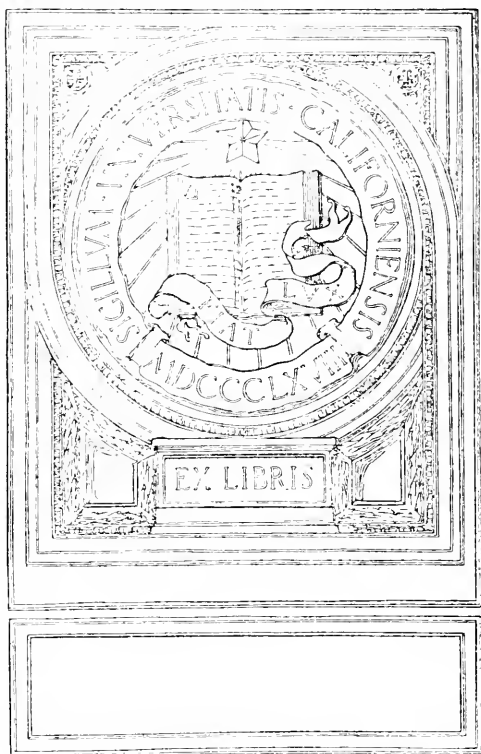


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MILITARY PEERS AND MILITARY PAUPERS.

*THE TWO EXTREMES OF ENGLISH
SOCIETY.*

BY

SAMUEL HUGHAN.



LONDON:

JOHN WATSON & CO.,

15, WATERLOO SQUARE.

1885.



HEREDITARY PEERS AND
HEREDITARY PAUPERS.

‘ The state of the times is so grievous that it really pierces through all private happiness, and haunts me daily like a personal calamity.’

DR. ARNOLD.

“ It fills me with astonishment to see Anti-Slavery Societies, so busy with the ends of the earth, and yet all the worst evils of Slavery existing among ourselves.”—*Ibid.*

“ I must write a Pamphlet or burst.”—*Ibid.*

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HEREDITARY PEERS AND HEREDITARY PAUPERS.

CHAPTER I.—INTRODUCTORY.

YOUNG LADIES' CHARMS MOST POWERFUL AT A
DISTANCE—THE DISENCHANTING POWER OF A
TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

MR. MATTHEW CUTHBERT, a Boston Transcendentalist, the son of a wealthy merchant, has, in the course of a European tour in the year of our Lord 18—, arrived in Dresden.

Much to his surprise, in the person of Miss Evangeline Lessing, the daughter of an old friend of his father's, he finds a young lady whose physical charms, though of a high order, are only a faint foreshadowing of a soul and intellect such, as in his most rose-coloured dreams of the possible, he has never imagined.

It is naturally some time before he can be convinced that his senses are not deceiving him. For his whole previous experience of

the fair sex has been something altogether different. From the serious effects produced upon his heart by pretty faces, not once nor twice, but often, has he been delivered by a lengthened *tête-à-tête*.

So long as the force of circumstances has kept him at a distance from the lovely charmer, the links forged by an ardent imagination for the enslavement of his soul have remained strong as adamant. A glimpse of a fairy face, caught at church or opera, would throw a spell over his susceptible soul. "What a divine smile!" he would mentally ejaculate. "What heavenly eyes! What an angelic face!" In the retirement of his lonely rooms, the very recollection, reproduced by an intensely vivid imagination, "would take his prisoned soul and lap it in Elysium."

And if one smile could so beguile, what ecstasy, he would reason, to approach the fairy-like creature, come within the immediate sphere of her attractions, sun oneself in those divine smiles, gaze into those heavenly eyes, and hang enraptured over every syllable that dropped from those ruby lips. He would move heaven and earth until he obtained an introduction.

The much-coveted introduction is obtained through an obliging friend. Heaven appears within his reach. He approaches his divinity upon the tiptoe of expectation. The smiles are indeed divine ! She parts her ruby lips ! He listens spell-bound, awestruck, his sole thought whether the angelic syllables will frame themselves into a language which a mortal may comprehend.

Can he believe his ears ? Surely that commonplace remark, that silly giggle will not be repeated ?

But, alas ! the next remark is upon a still lower key. The chain is not now so adamantine.

The conversation proceeds. The fairy-like creature unfolds her intellectual wings ! Alas ! she proves, like her predecessors—to be of the earth earthy. The dulcet sounds that proceed from those ruby lips are married to the most prosaic and commonplace thoughts. As point after point of her character unrolls to his critical inspection, link after link of that ethereal chain which had bound his soul snaps. The sharp click is audible to his inner ear.

An hour's *tête-à-tête*, during which his

strained vision has been unable to descry upon her mental horizon the dawning of a single original idea. The chain which had been of adamant is now of gossamer. A good healthy appetite at supper-time, unrelieved except by a little vacuous twittering as to balls and operas, completes his disenchantment. He goes home bored.

This, with variations, had been Mat's experience over and over again. His fervid imagination made him exceedingly susceptible to female charms. But, thanks to his keen critical faculties, he very speedily cooled down, a nearer inspection revealing to him the prosaic facts.

His first *tête-à-tête* with Miss Lessing, however, had, to his astonishment, heightened his admiration instead of lessening it. There had been no dreadful pauses in that first conversation. Could his intellectual steel be of finer grain than he had hitherto suspected? Or were the sparks and flashes of thought, that had responded to each slightest stroke, to be attributed to the fact that he had at last chanced upon a rare flint full of concealed fire?

It was more than delightful to have a

listener whose sympathies were so wide, and whose perceptions were so keen,—one who appreciated to the full the best things that his mind could furnish when in its highest moods, and one upon whom the faintest shade of humour or satire was never thrown away.

In conversation with Miss Lessing, Mat found himself enjoying that rare satisfaction, the consciousness that he was talking his best. He was astonished, in fact, at his own flights. He was really a much cleverer fellow than he had given himself credit for. At first, indeed, he had been continually apprehensive of coming suddenly upon the dead wall which formed the outer boundary of her intellectual resources. This had been his experience with so many people—male as well as female—whose acquaintance, with youthful enthusiasm, he had too hastily set down as constituting an era in his life. But as yet, in the region of Miss Lessing's mind, he had not caught the most distant glimpse of a boundary, whether dead wall or ornamental palisade.

Naturally, in their conversations, the subject that most frequently came up was the merits, or rather demerits, of the “peculiar institu-

tion." Mat's judgment and reason were clear as to the wrong and impolicy of slavery. But his feelings were still intensely Southern. He saw clearly that the Southern states, whilst apparently their own masters, were really being driven along by the force of fate ; that they were themselves the blind slaves of circumstance, swayed irresistibly by the climatic adaptation of their soil to the growth of tobacco and cotton. And being unable to urge one word in their defence, the only way in which he could relieve his surcharged patriotic feelings was by pitching into the plaintiff's attorneys, and unsparingly depicting their gross inconsistencies and transparent hypocrisies. Amongst these self-constituted attorneys, the English being by far the most conspicuous, to them, as a natural consequence, Mat directed his keenest and most trenchant criticisms.

Towards England, indeed, Mat was keenly critical rather than appreciative. He looked at her through a " Bunker Hill " atmosphere, that was apt to bring out her defects in a strong light. And expecting, as he did, to be assailed upon the slavery question, he had

made up his mind that, instead of listening supinely to stale dissertations upon the national sin, he would boldly carry the war into the enemy's country. The weak points of the European position he had studied from this standpoint, and naturally some of his conclusions were rather startling. He had become convinced, in his own mind, that slavery was merely one phase of a question which was world-wide, and not, as some narrow-minded fanatics were in the habit of insisting, confined to the United States.

It must not be inferred that subjects more tender than politico-economic ones were never touched upon by the fair Evangeline and her "Transcendental" admirer, Mr. Matthew Cuthbert. These, however, must be left to the reader's imagination, the present purpose being merely to gather together certain conversations upon subjects which, though not then, have now become burning questions, leaving to the said imagination the filling in of appropriate dramatic scenery, and the sketching in of the lights and shades and other well-understood sentimental surroundings.

CHAPTER II.

ENGLAND WIDE AWAKE TO THE WOES OF BLACK
PEOPLE, BUT ENTIRELY UNCONCERNED AS TO
THE WOES OF WHITE ONES.

MR. CUTHBERT'S expectations of being assailed on the slavery question were fully realised. He found that the conscience of Europe was everywhere awake to the iniquities of slavery, particularly democratic American slavery. But with a strange inconsistency, side by side with this ultra-humanitarian sentiment, he found a spirit of arrogant inhumanity and utter apathy, so far as the very poor were concerned, which, though partly anticipated, yet in its actual heartlessness completely appalled him. That the feelings and woes of black people were matters entirely outside the consideration of white people, was a characteristic of the mental and moral atmosphere in which he had been brought up—

a sentiment with which use and wont had made him strangely familiar. But that to white people the feelings and woes of white people should be a matter of such supreme and utter indifference was an experience new and startling, and impressed him with the force of something altogether unnatural.

In Boston a poor white man was one of the ruling caste, a voter in town meetings, to cater to whose necessities and aspirations was one of the main purposes for which society existed. His poverty was an accident, the result of the mischances of the day—something which might befall a man in any condition of life, and therefore unaccompanied by that bitterest ingredient of poverty, a sense of personal humiliation. And there were always the thousand chances hidden in the bosom of the unknown to-morrow. The thought of these imparted a feeling of boundless elasticity and hope, which seemed to fill the very air he breathed, enabling him to hold his head high, and breast with manly dignity and fortitude the sea of troubles which had for the moment overwhelmed him. But the poverty of the European labourer was some-

thing wholly different. It seemed the effect of a law of nature—something from which there was no escape ; and far from exciting the least surprise, was regarded as much a thing of course as the condition of splendour and security in which reposed the classes above him.

That in such a society Mr. Cuthbert was not prepared to listen with deep respect to dissertations on the glories of human liberty is not surprising, nor is it much to be wondered at that he frequently struck back with a force and emphasis which imparted to his hearers an altogether new sensation.

“ I have been trying very hard, Miss Lessing,” said he, one evening when the irrepressible negro question had come upon the carpet ; “ I have been trying very hard to make out the real value of what you so proudly term European freedom, but apart from certain sentimental considerations, I find exceedingly little to appraise. If I am to look at it from the standpoint of prosaic fact, I must honestly say that our Virginian slaves are in many respects more happily situated than your freemen.”

“ I have heard of that claim, Mr. Cuthbert, but I confess I have not yet been able to

understand how you make it out. In what respects, pray," this with rather an incredulous look, "are they better off than our European freemen?"

"In everything that goes to make up the important item of material comfort. Were workmen pure spirits—a species of Scotch Brownie, without any troublesome physical necessities—they might, I grant you, fare here right royally. But, so long as the first necessity of existence, and, therefore, the first condition of happiness, is an adequate supply of the merely animal wants, our slaves will enjoy a degree of happiness to which, generally speaking, your freemen are strangers."

"Don't you agree with the country mouse," queried Evangeline, with a demure air, "that a hollow tree, a crust of bread, and liberty, are incomparably superior to the most delicate fare without it?"

"I do," replied Mat; "but I think your European scale of wages has been calculated too exclusively from that standpoint. I think employers might treat their workmen to something more substantial than mouse's fare, without altogether demoralising them."

“A more varied diet would certainly not hurt them,” conceded Evangeline.

“Were this crust of bread,” continued Mat, “about which the poet is so eloquent, really to be calculated upon, there is no doubt that liberty would go a long way to sweeten it. But even that not over luxurious fare is not always forthcoming.”

“That also,” said Evangeline, bent upon being magnanimous, “I am afraid I must admit.”

“So far as I can see, the labourer here, when in regular employment, just manages to keep his family from actual starvation. There is certainly no margin, as with us, for luxuries, or for a rainy day. You will not, as in New York or Boston, see an unmarried workman sitting down to a dinner of three courses, topping off with mince pie if in winter-time, or possibly with ice-cream if in summer-time.”

“Mince-pie and ice-cream for labourers!” exclaimed Evangeline. “You astonish me. The millennium must have arrived and begun at New York.”

“Not quite,” rejoined Mat; “though if

your mechanics and labourers sat down to beef and mutton three times a day, as many of ours do, they would conclude it could not be very far off."

"They would be afraid that it was something quite uncanny, some hallucination of the evil one, certain to vanish as soon as attacked with steel knife and fork."

"Between a diet of for the most part black bread and the white breads, and varied meats and fruits—the latter even including strawberries and peaches—that *our* labourers luxuriate in, there is certainly a whole heaven of difference—a difference which, when contrasted with the meagre diet he has left behind him, must seem to the European labourer just landed on our shores liker some beautiful dream, than solid, sober reality. When I think of the careful planning and contrivance necessary in even good times to enable the honest labourer here to make both ends meet—when I see that even when practising the strictest self-denial, and confining himself and family to the very coarsest fare, he is nevertheless liable to be put in prison should he by any chance commit the awful enormity of getting

into debt, I am lost in astonishment at the brazen effrontery of those who call upon such men to risk life and limb in the defence of a country that has done, and does so little, for them. If," he exclaimed wistfully, "if there were only some means of transporting a few millions of them to our broad prairies."

"If there were only some means of transporting the labourer to unoccupied lands, and giving him a start in life, it would seem as if the labour problem would soon be solved."

"What complicates the matter is, that to give him a fair start a good deal is required in addition to expenses of transportation. Implements, seeds, a rude place of shelter, and sufficient to live upon until the first crops have been grown and reaped, are absolutely indispensable."

"To procure all which," said Evangeline sadly, "is of course utterly beyond his power."

"It will be a long time before many of the labouring classes, except such as have literally a passion for saving, and by dint of great exertion and self-denial, have contrived to get one year ahead, will be able to avail themselves of the advantages of emigration."

“And meantime, the rest must just struggle on, until the problem of their misery and destitution can be averted no longer.”

“Until that point has been reached, until the throne or system of government under which such a condition of society has been possible, is really endangered by its continuance, it will not receive the slightest attention.”

“One would think that it would be to the interests of our upper classes to grapple with it long before that point had been reached.”

“The interests of our upper classes!” repeated Mat bitterly; “their interests, unfortunately, lie quite in another direction. From their standpoint, the denser the population the more valuable their lands, the lower the cost of labour, and the greater their margin of profits, whether from agriculture, manufactures, or mines.”

“That looks,” said Evangeline, slightly horror struck, “as if the luxury of our landed proprietors and upper classes were wrung from the misery and destitution of the lower ones.”

“I grant you that there is an appearance

of cause and effect. It looks as if there *were* some connection between them, and as if such a disposition of the social wealth, as metes out unbounded luxury to the few, rags and intermittent starvation to the many, could scarcely be quite equitable."

"Upon that all are agreed. It is only when we come to consider the why and the wherefore that differences arise. It seems difficult, if not impossible, to point out exactly where the great inequity or iniquity lies. For, outwardly, everything is done in accordance with the requirements of law and order."

"It is certainly no easy matter to point out exactly where the inequity occurs. Those who make off with the world's wealth do it so deftly and skilfully, as to make it appear that they are merely walking off with their own share. And they contrive, during the process, to squirt out so much printer's ink, that their path is as effectually obscured as that of the cuttle-fish, and any attempt to track them about as hopeless."

"I see distinctly that the wealth and splendour of our mediæval barons, like the wealth and splendour of your southern planters, were

wrung directly from their serfs. But we have changed all that, and though the splendour of the one class and the squalor of the other remain as marked and conspicuous as ever, there is a missing link, it appears to me, in the chain of reasoning, that would still attribute the one to the other."

"The whole matter is certainly more complex than of yore, when the gentlemen of Europe simply clapped their hands upon their swords, and helped themselves to whatever they wanted."

"I am not sure that that is a perfectly fair representation of our mediæval chivalry. But be that as it may, you cannot deny, that however prone in days of yore to forget the distinction between *meum* and *tuum*, there are now no more scrupulous sticklers for the rights of property than our barons."

"That scrupulous upholding of the rights of property would be more praiseworthy were the motive a little less open to suspicion. From my blunt standpoint, it bears a strong resemblance to the sermon preached by the friar against stealing, when, as the old proverb has it, he had the pudding in his sleeve."

“Possibly,” suggested Evangeline, “the stings of an outraged conscience may have imparted an unusual piquancy to the good friar’s eloquence.”

“The public have an idea that he could have preached a much more brilliant and effective discourse had he started out by making restitution of the pudding. For myself, I think the poor friar has been pilloried in that proverb long enough. I have no doubt there were extenuating circumstances in the case, though, it must be confessed, appearances were against him. But had some wit recited in pithy lines how certain noble barons, immediately after stealing the entire lands of England and the liberties of its people, were moved, in the sacred interests of honesty, to enact the most draconic laws against theft, a much more pertinent illustration, and a much more effective proverb, would have been the result.”

“To say the least of it,” said Evangeline, “it seems to have been one of the most miraculous cases of sudden conversion of which we have any authentic record.”

“The most thundering instance of hypocrisy

upon record," said Mat, a little too excited to be choice in his language. "Though it must be admitted, in their behalf, that—except when public funds were within reach—they have been fairly honest ever since. The fact is," continued Mat, walking round excitedly, "that if a man must steal, he had better do it upon a gigantic scale. The greatness of the theft imparts to it a species of respectability. The additional guilt upon the soul is not worth quibbling about. And ever afterwards, his heirs and successors, along with other luxuries of his procuring, have within easy reach that most exquisite of all—the luxury of posing before an admiring public as the very embodiments of stainless honour and rectitude. A great robbery is simply an act of praiseworthy self-sacrifice committed in the interest of one's remotest descendants."

"I have often puzzled my woman's soul in the effort to ascertain why the degree of guilt attached to theft and murder should be so miraculously lifted from them so soon as, from the strictly definite and known, they mount up into the indefinite and unknown quantities. The degree of guilt seems to be,

not as one would naturally suppose, in proportion to, but in inverse ratio to the amount of crime committed. If to theft on a grand scale you add murder on an equally grand scale, you have that human combination known as hero—possibly even an embryo emperor. But if your thefts are on a limited scale, and your murders merely the result of an occasional caprice, instead of being on the road to empire, you are on the way to the gallows.”

“The mediæval barons seem to have been a kind of cross between the two. Not that their delight in pillage and murder could be considered limited,—that would be doing them an injustice,—but merely that their opportunities of committing either were never quite equal to their ambition. When the miserable Saxons ceased to afford scope for their efforts in these directions, they turned round viciously upon the country that had given them birth; and that resource failing them,—owing to the heroism of one Joan of Arc,—in default of better material,—like true geniuses,—they fell back upon themselves, and for a time luxuriated in the delight of plundering and murdering each other. The

last effort seemed, if possible, to afford them more supreme satisfaction than any previous one. To mark, therefore, their sense of the exquisite flavour of the fine aroma of the delight that they experienced in robbing and murdering each other, the Normans named these latter wars the Wars of the Roses."

"I find it next to impossible to preserve that deep respect for rank in which I have been educated; not, I think, that I am deficient in the qualities that tend to hero-worship, but simply because the most diligent search fails to find objects worthy of the least reverence. Traced to their origin, what are termed noble families, instead of affording, in their inception, instances of the noblest qualities that dignify human nature, seem, by some weird species of natural selection, to have been chosen from the most vicious specimens that have disgraced humanity. It is only by an exercise of the most biting sarcasm that such men can be termed noble. What a complete pandemonium they did make of merrie England!"

"By a great effort of the imagination, I can understand, in some faint measure, this in-

human delight in robbery and murder. It is a species of horrible insanity, of which the world, unfortunately, still presents numerous instances. What I find more difficult of comprehension is the deep and unblushing hypocrisy which accompanied it. Having, with high-handed insolence, taken everything there was to steal, the Normans turned right round, and with grave countenances and unrelaxed muscles, said to those whom they had just plundered, Now let us have law and order. Let us make a fresh start, each respecting scrupulously the rights of our neighbour, and regarding with the utmost horror the slightest infringement of the rights of property."

"That looks like one of my missing links. It is the colour of law and order, if not of justice, under which the arrangements of modern civilization are carried out, that lends to the oppression of our working classes their most puzzling, as well as heart-breaking, features."

"Starting under such unpropitious circumstances generations ago, how is it possible," asked Mat, "that the condition of the European labourer can be other than squalid? *Ex nihilo nihil fit.*"

“The labourer’s condition is certainly deplorable, even in the best of times, when work is plenty and wages are at their highest. When times are bad, and there is no work to be had, the distress he is called upon to suffer and live through only a very vivid imagination can comprehend. What heroism must be required to starve in the midst of plenty, in deference to the requirements of law and order!”

“Our slaves have two great advantages.”

“To see the advantages of slavery,” said Evangeline briskly, “must require a very keen vision, or else a very powerful imagination.”

“On the contrary, they are of a very pronounced and tangible character. The first is the thickness of their skins, both literally and figuratively.”

“I should think by all accounts,” said Evangeline, looking up with a merry twinkle in her eyes, “that that was a decided advantage. Whatever the effect figuratively, there can be no doubt that, for the black man in your good country, a thick skin literally, must be a great desideratum.”

“The advantage of this less sensitive con-

stitution," said Mat, ignoring the interruption, "is, that evils, which to the more sensitive temperament of white people would be absolutely intolerable, barely ruffle the surface of the more placid temperament and feelings of the negro. The second advantage is of a more tangible character still. He has never, like the European workmen of whom we have just been speaking, to stare *actual famine* in the face. His corn bread—his hog and hominy, never fail in the severest of winters, or the hardest of times. A Planter"—this very energetically—"would as soon think of starving his horses, as of starving his niggers."

"That much," said Evangeline reluctantly, "I am afraid I will have to grant"—then after a moment's pause—"it seems dreadful that I *cannot honestly claim as much for our employers.*"

"Can it be wondered at," asked Mat, following up his success, "that this great weight taken entirely off his shoulders—this harassing struggle to devise ways and means, which keeps his poor white brother continually on the verge of distraction—the light-hearted

negro should rise to the surface of life like a cork—and instead of having worry and trouble written in deep lines on his face, should present himself before an unbelieving European public, as the very embodiment of physical comfort and content? ”

“ Question—question ! ” exclaimed Evangeline, laughing.

But, unheeding the interruption, Mat continued, “ In the intervals of labour he has nothing to do but enjoy himself—‘ dance all night until broad daylight, and go home with the gals in the morning. ’ ”

“ I see,” said Evangeline, who thought it high time to stop this rodomontade. “ Your planters are certainly much misunderstood men. They are really philanthropists, who, noting with calm philosophic eyes the extreme difficulty poor folks have to make both ends meet, magnanimously, and out of the fulness of their warm hearts, take this dreadful burden off their shoulders.”

“ Not exactly,” said Mat, laughing in spite of himself ; “ though I have no doubt, some of them would not only swallow the compliment, but insist besides that they were God’s

appointed agents for the evangelization of the heathen. But, if it did not pay handsomely, I am afraid the philanthropic zeal and missionary enthusiasm of my friends, the slaveholders, would soon sputter out."

"I do not see," said Evangeline, whose keen sense of justice had been at work, "that I can avoid granting that your negroes really enjoy a rude plenty, which I cannot justly claim for our own day labourers, so much more intelligent and in every way capable. And yet—even from the slaveholders' standpoint—a standpoint not currently believed to be specially disinterested—they are entitled to at least meat and clothes the year round, in exchange for their labour."

"Do you think," asked the remorseless Mat, "that your close-fisted, shrewd employer will pay one cent more for labour than it is actually worth in the labour market? That if—owing to the competition of the thousands struggling for bare existence—he can engage labour for what virtually amounts to *half meat and clothes—and, judged from our American standpoint, that is what the miserable pittance of wages given here, really amounts*

to—he will voluntarily, and out of pure beneficence, agree to give double?”

“I wish from my heart,” replied Evangeline, “I could say ‘yes.’ But I am afraid that any employer of labour, who should offer to do such a thing, would be considered by his friends as having taken leave of his senses, and as having become a fit subject for the Lunatic Asylum.”

“In justice to our ‘domestic institution,’ it must be said that our slaveholders cannot avoid doing this. If they did, their human property would immediately depreciate in value.”

“That seems to be the essence of the difficulty. There is a community of interest binding the slaveholder to the slave. The tie is as strong as pure selfishness can make it. But between the employer of labour here and his workmen there is not even this. The divorce between the interests of the one and the interests of the other is as complete as circumstances can make it.”

“Thank you, Miss Lessing. That puts the case fairly. The tie between the slaveholder and the slave is at least a human

one! He cannot afford to be insensible to the health and happiness of a valuable piece of property. But what human tie is there between the manufacturer and his workmen? The stipulated wages once paid, every legal claim has been honourably discharged. If it suits his pocket, or the exigencies of a glutted market, to discharge a thousand workmen,^{*} he does it without the slightest compunction. If they starve or hang themselves, it is no concern of his!"—this last with an intensely bitter expression.

"Your case, Mr. Cuthbert, is certainly stronger than I thought. It really looks as if our landholders and manufacturers shared all the pecuniary advantages of slavery, without incurring any of its responsibilities. They get their workmen for a price which barely suffices for food and house-rent, not to speak of clothes. And even this pittance is immediately withdrawn the moment a workman becomes sick, and therefore in more urgent need than ever. As if disease were not enough, his family must battle at the same instant with starvation."

"To battle with either is difficult enough.

How an ordinary workman's honesty can stand the terrible strain involved in battling with both is more than I can imagine."

"It must certainly be of a much tougher quality than the article which passes muster for such in good society."

"The negro, whose woes the European manufacturer feels so keenly, fares very differently. The moment he is sick, the planter's wife is all tenderness and anxiety to get him well again. He has a doctor to attend him, and all the extras that at such a time are necessities. Europe is aghast," he continued more warmly, "at the brutality of the slaveholder, but sees only justice in a system which allows its manufacturers to discharge men by the hundred and the thousand whenever their self-interest seems to require it—men to whose skill and intelligent labour they are indebted for their huge fortunes."

"That is one of those queer cases, unfortunately rather numerous in society as at present constituted, in which justice to a man's own interests seems to require that he should resolutely close his eyes to the interests of his neighbours."

“Yes!” responded Mat. “And keep them tightly shut until the market takes an upward turn. I said just now that manufacturers here treat their workmen worse than if they were slaves. But, as discharge virtually means a sentence to starvation for an indefinite period, it really amounts to treating intelligent white workmen worse than horses and mules, *for they are fed and comfortably housed—work or no work.*”

“It does seem atrocious that treatment, which in the case of a brute which had served you faithfully, would be undoubted cruelty, should be only prudent self-interest, when meted out to a brother man.”

“Were I a workman in Germany or England I should agitate for the inherent right of the labourer to be at least put upon an equality, so far as substantial comfort was concerned, with his master’s cattle and horses.”

“Is the case really so bad as that?” asked Evangeline.

“The matter is not difficult to decide,” replied Mat. “It only requires that we contrast the well-appointed comfortable stables, in which cattle and horses are housed, with

the miserable clay-floored hovels in the country, and the still more miserable and rickety tenement houses in the filthy courts and alleys of the city, in which intelligent white labourers are obliged to live, places where they have not even the decencies, much less the conveniences, of life. Contrast the certainty of the horse's meals and his substantial fare, with the uncertainty of the workman's, and its deficiencies, not only in quality, but even in quantity."

"You make out a terrible case against us. It almost looks as if we had as big a beam in our eye, as you have in yours."

"The determination to utterly ignore the beam in our own eye has never received a more striking illustration than in Europe, at the present moment. They discourse in England upon the woes of the poor black man, until the tears run down their philanthropic cheeks, but for the woes of the poor white man, kept by low wages continually on the very verge of starvation, they have no sympathy whatever."

"You feel strongly upon this question, and I can scarcely wonder at it. But this labour

system of ours, in which you have contrived to pick so many flaws, suits our upper and middle classes. *They* believe it to be the most glorious condition of things the world has ever seen—the very richest fruit, in fact, of nineteenth century civilization.”

“It is the same with us,” said Mat; and then in a tone of deep discouragement continued, “Men cannot apparently see any wrong in a system which keeps their own pockets comfortably filled. From that standpoint, it is excellent, just, and worthy of being perpetuated. And as for those who do not see it exactly in this light, they are pestiferous Radicals and disturbers of society. Kings,” he added slowly, “have never yet begun an agitation in favour of Republics, and never will.”

“I think that here in Europe we are in a transition state. In feudal times, dreadful as in many respects they were, society was united by the closest bonds of mutual interest. The lives of lords and knights sometimes depending upon the prowess of the men who tilled their fields—they were not likely to dismiss them when work was scarce, careless

whether they starved or not. Now, however, that society depends for protection upon its standing armies, the strong arms of the labourer can be dispensed with. His position in society is therefore relatively much less important than in what we are accustomed to speak of as the dark ages. If you could only suggest how this position is to be recovered, and if, possible, improved ! ”

“ I am afraid,” said Mat sadly, “ that we have not sufficient wisdom to solve our own labour problem, much less yours.”

“ The interests of those who constitute *Society*, and who alone have the power of making their grievances heard, are so bound up with the permanence of existing arrangements, that it is impossible for them to see their defects. We see,” this with an arch glance, “ the intolerable wickedness of *your* labour system, and have any number of remedies heartily at *your* service. The only way to restore the moral equilibrium, is for *you* to confer upon *us* a like favour.”

“ If we could only contrive to extract that little mote, Slavery, from the American orb of vision, we would most willingly, *con mucho*

gusto, as the Spaniards say, attack this monstrous beam in yours. Until that has been accomplished you will have to excuse us."

"This social condition, which from your stand point is so deplorable, seems to most of us, as natural as the revolution of the earth round the sun. That the millions should work as long as they can see—subsist on scantiest fare—and never be more than a few days ahead of starvation, appears, to every well-regulated mind, the normal condition of a well-ordered society. That a thousand men should toil, and that one man should scoop up the entire profits, seems not only to our thoughtful, but even to our religious people, a condition of things ordained of God."

This last idea seemed more than Mat's equanimity could stand. "If," said he, "those miserable Pharisees and Sadducees, who constitute our good society, could only have a taste of that condition of things, of which they speak so glibly, as ordained of God, from the under, instead of the upper side, how speedily they would discover that it was an atrocious shame, and not to be tolerated one instant."

“The change of view would make a wonderful difference”—then, after a little thoughtful consideration—“No one will deny, that the brain of every enterprise, is more important than the feet, and entitled, therefore, to reap a richer reward. The difficulty is as to what constitutes a just division of the joint wealth of the social body. For it really seems as if the brain and upper parts were bent upon drawing the entire blood from the extremities to themselves—heedless of the atrophy in the one case, or the apoplexy in the other.”

“That figure seems to bring out the truth in clear light. A healthy condition of society is doubtless one in which the life-blood circulates freely to every part of the body—toes included—in which each member has that which it can assimilate—no more and no less. That is Utopia. Meantime the condition of the extremities of European society is deplorable enough. Your slave, or, as you prefer to call them, labour, markets are so glutted, that, whilst a young calf, or colt, or even pig is a thing of value to be brought up tenderly—a young boy or girl is regarded as something having a factitious, but no intrinsic value.

You ought to see the look of intense satisfaction with which a Virginian planter regards a plump little nigger of either sex."

"And so," said Evangeline, unable to repress her intense disgust, "do the chiefs of the Cannibal Islands the little children they are rearing for the pot."

"I beg your pardon for putting my idea in so repellent a form."

"I scarcely know," said Evangeline, slightly mollified, "which fills me with the greatest horror—the brutal satisfaction with which, as you say, a Virginian planter regards his human property, or the brutal indifference with which our constituted authorities regard the little images of God, which roam our streets in nakedness and dirt."

"In my humble opinion, the first essential of society is a condition of things in which human life, if not regarded as something sacred and precious, is considered as at least equally valuable with that of the lower animals. I think, therefore, with all due deference, that your cannibal illustration, though telling as a retort, does not do our planters justice. The slave-owners' standpoint

may be a coarse one—but, even from his low—if you will, base and sordid—standpoint, the value of human life is secured. Compared with a state of things in which men, taken prisoners on the battle-field, were offered up in sacrifice to the gods; or that still lower depth of human degradation, when the captive was reserved for the horrible orgies of the cannibal feast, slavery was felt by every humane mind to be, and really was, a step in the direction of an advanced civilization. For people cannot, all at once, rise from the depths of barbarism to the heights involved in our Patrick Henry's exclamation, 'Give me liberty—or give me Death.'"

"I acknowledge that there is much more in your ideas than I had at first supposed. I see, indeed, that it is merely another way of expressing an old truth. For, I now recollect, that He, who 'spake as never man spake,' thundered in the ears of the Pharisaic bigots of His day, that the life of a man was of equal value to that of an ox or an ass, to save either of which they were prepared to overleap, if necessary, even the most sacred of their traditions."

“Exactly my argument. I had no idea that anti-Sabbatarian speech had so wide a reach. But, though in the form I put it the idea was sound, it was clothed in so repellent a guise, as to disgust rather than attract.”

“And call forth my rather ill-natured retort.”

“A retort richly deserved. But you can understand that it is next to impossible to have been brought up, as I have been, in an atmosphere of slavery, without having a little of the delicate bloom rubbed off my perceptions of human rights.”

“What astonishes me is that these perceptions should be so delicate,” turning upon Mat, as she said so, two blue eyes of bewildering beauty and sweetness.

“If you could have known my mother” said Mat, a sudden tenderness suffusing his dark eyes, “you would have understood it.”

“I believe,” he continued, “that slavery has really added to the sacredness of human life. From the lowest point of view, it has put the life of a young negro upon an equality of value with that of a young ox or ass—a point of view, to which, despite the utterances,

eighteen centuries ago, of the great Reformer of Nazareth, I cannot see that the much vaunted civilization of Europe has as yet attained."

"It certainly looks like it."

"What makes the contrast all the stronger is, that here, in Europe, you regard property of all kinds, down even to a worthless bundle of sticks, with a semi-religious veneration, approaching to awe, whilst—unless in aristocratic settings—you regard human life—life that in its highest moods allies itself to the Infinite—as something absolutely valueless."

"I can think of no reason why it should be so," said Evangeline, a little bitterly, "except that it is not, as with you, *saleable*."

CHAPTER III.

THE COW-HIDE A MISTAKE.

“It seems to me that people are not enough aware of the monstrous state of society, absolutely without a parallel in the history of the world—with a population poor, miserable, and degraded in body and mind—as much as if they were slaves, and yet called freemen.”—DR. ARNOLD.

“I feel the state of public affairs so deeply that I cannot bear, either to read, or hear, or speak, or write about them. Only I would recommend them to God’s care and deliverance, if the judgment is not now as surely fixed as that of Babylon.”—*Ibid.*

“It seems necessary to look through foreign spectacles, if one would learn the real condition of the country. I have to thank you, Mr. Cuthbert, for placing several things, the other evening, in quite a new light.”

“Until the life of a white child shall be at the least as valuable as that of a young colt or a plantation negro, Europe, I think, has studied the first lesson in civilization to very little purpose.”

“That, certainly, is not asking too much of us,” conceded Evangeline.

“From the standpoint of political economy I am convinced that slavery is a huge mistake, and that the European wages system is the best. From the moral standpoint it would take a toss up to decide. Employers here are as firmly convinced that the masses were created for *their* especial benefit, as the Southerners that the negroes were created for *theirs*. They differ slightly in their methods, that is all. To effect his purposes the slave-holder resorts to physical force. He believes in the cow-hide. Your shrewder employer has resort to a method, which, while making less outcry, is at the same time much more effective. He believes in starvation!”

“I am not sure that I comprehend. I acknowledge the terrible *per contra* account you make out, but I think you do not sufficiently realise how priceless, after all, is his inherited freedom to the European labourer.”

“Granted,” replied Mat, “that the European labourer is free. How far does this vaunted freedom extend? He finds himself existing—I will not say living—in the midst of

a gorgeous civilization, to none of the delights of which he has the slightest natural right. He finds himself without even its barest necessities! As to its delights"—this with a mocking emphasis—"they are a heaven entirely out of his reach."

"Virtually," conceded Evangeline mournfully, "he finds himself outside the pale of civilization, if born outside an exceedingly limited circle."

"Worse than that. He finds himself not only outside the pale of civilization—but, if there is such a thing, outside the pale of barbarism as well."

"I do not see," said Evangeline, with a puzzled expression, "how it is possible for him to be outside the pale of both."

"Were he born within the pale of barbarism—say within the wilds of Africa, or in the savage islands of the Southern seas, his condition would be infinitely better. For he is not even free, in the limited sense, in which the savage of the wilderness is free—free to develope himself physically to the highest point,—free to fish, shoot, or hunt as the inclination seizes him, free to gather the fruits

that the earth offers to him spontaneously, or to raise those in the production of which she requires his labour and co-operation. He is only free in the exceedingly narrow sense that the civilizee is free—that is—free to starve. Should he attempt to exercise the slightest natural right, should he undertake, like his savage brother, to fish, shoot, or hunt, he will speedily find himself within the four walls of a prison ! ”

“ You certainly contrive to place our European civilization in a very unflattering light. According to you, it has taken from the great majority all the advantages of a savage state, and failed, as yet, to confer upon them any of the undoubted advantages of a civilized one. You are willing only to allow the European the possession of a freedom which fails him the very instant he attempts to make the slightest use of it.”

“ I am willing enough,” replied Mat, emphasising the word, “ were it only consistent with a state of sanity, to come to any other conclusion.”

Then, after a few moments, continued—
“ Looked at closely, this freedom of yours

shrinks into very narrow dimensions. The European labourer, awakening to a consciousness of his surroundings, finds himself in a world where he is free, but where his natural rights—those rights which alone make freedom worthy of the name—are absolutely *nil*! He finds himself with a mouth clamorous to be filled, but discovers, to his disgust, that the sole recognised source of the good things that fill it—the land—has, unfortunately for him, been divided up some centuries before his arrival, and is as absolutely closed to him as if he were a natural denizen of the sea or air, and had no rights in the land whatever.”

“The advantages of being a denizen of sea or air are evidently greater than I had imagined. The new comers are in no way embarrassed by finding themselves shut out from the enjoyment of the good things in their respective spheres, by the existence of vested rights of a strictly exclusive character. The monsters of the deep are, I have no doubt, bad enough, but they have not yet been able to see their way to the establishment of monopolies.”

“And, unfortunately,” replied Mat, laughing heartily, “our monsters have.”

“It does seem an anomalous state of things, and somewhat puzzling. It does not harmonize with the evident designs of nature, however much it may chime in with the deductions of Political Economy, that the Lord of Creation should find himself with no natural rights to the creation whatever.”

“There are Lords of Creation, and Lords of Creation,” said Mat, oracularly. “The one finds that the arrangements of this lower world have for some centuries been conducted with an express view to his expected arrival. The other finds that with the exception of jails, whipping posts, pillories, and little gruesome attentions of that character, no particular pains have been taken with a view to his reception. European freedom simply amounts to this. That the labourer is free to choose the form and character of his slavery. This done, he becomes a volunteer slave during his entire waking moments, in return for the miserable boon of such a sufficiency of the coarsest food, as will save him from absolute starvation.”

“I think that picture slightly overdrawn, but it is a little difficult for me to say exactly where. If obliged to specify, I should object, I think, to the phrase—‘his entire waking moments.’”

“I will willingly allow you to modify that phrase, so as to make it in entire accordance with the facts, which, heaven knows, are melancholy enough, without the aid of exaggeration. I am unable, however, to recognise any special advantages that your free men have over our slaves, in the matter of either hours or labour.”

“I suppose that there must be some, but I confess that for the moment they have escaped me.”

“Not at all surprising,” said Mat, smiling. “They are of a decidedly fugitive character—members, doubtless, of that

“Borealis race,
Which flit, ere you can point their place.”

“As an actual fact,” he continued, “your free men work harder and accomplish more than our slaves, another proof that starvation is a much more effective instrument of coercion than the cow-hide.”

“Or, as we put it,” suggested Evangeline, “another proof of the advantages of free over slave labour.”

“I will willingly,” replied Mat, “allow you any advantage that comes from the admission that your free men have to work harder than our slaves! But, personally, it is an advantage with which, as a free man, I would gladly dispense.”

“How very magnanimous!” exclaimed Evangeline.

“Not magnanimous,” replied Mat. “Only fair. In Germany and England,” he continued, “you have upon a large scale, what one sees in Barbadoes, for instance, upon a smaller one. The slaves there were emancipated. There was a great flourish of trumpets. Liberty was proclaimed throughout the island. But the island was small—the land all in possession of, or controlled by, the Planting interest. The white men were few. But they had entire control of the Legislature, as well as of the land, and were virtually a unit. The negro population was large, but, having no cohesive power, their numbers, instead of proving a source of strength, were,

under the skilful manipulation of their old masters, adroitly turned against them. *Crowds seeking work enable masters to fix wages low.* They simply said to the negroes, 'Work at the wages we choose to give, or starve!' This weapon was fully as effective as the cow-hide. The masters retained that power, which, in Jamaica, where there was room to squat, dropped from their hands."

"That seems like taking advantage of their necessities, to rob them of the wages to which they were justly entitled."

"Current morality does not call it by such an ugly name. The planters would reply that, as business men, they simply availed themselves of the advantages of an entrenched position, and dictated terms."

"But," replied Evangeline, "it was dictating terms at the mouth of the Pistol—Starvation. And, between compelling one to give his labour for less than it is justly worth and robbery, the dividing line is extremely narrow. These Barbadoes planters seem to have picked the Oyster—Freedom—very carefully, and thrown to the poor negroes the shell."

"If the white labourers of Europe have

anything more than that—if any of the Oyster has been left for them to regale themselves with—I must say, I have been unable to discover it. But the Barbadoes planters would use a very different figure. They would say, that, by grasping the Nettle—Emancipation—boldly, they had succeeded in plucking out its sting. It was an admirable arrangement for them. The British Government allowed them over eight millions of dollars, by way of compensation for the loss of rights, which, as the event proved, they still retained—the right of compelling a certain amount of labour, for less than it was intrinsically worth, being the essence of their whole claim! As the whole island is only one hundred thousand acres in extent, and only some sixty to seventy thousand acres are under cultivation, this was certainly a magnificent working capital. The negroes, for the alleged loss of whom the eight millions were paid, were as much under their control as before. And they were relieved at once of the care of the sick, the aged, and the helpless—all clear gain. The wages question presented no difficulty. For the negro popu-

lation being dense, the competition in the labour market was as keen as the planters could desire. The wages were fixed agreeably to the august law of supply and demand. *Their control of the land* made them masters of the situation."

"That seems to prove that *when all the land is in possession of a few, the many must either work at the wages they choose to give, or starve.* To talk of supply and demand in such a case is a mockery."

"To question the law of supply and demand, Miss Lessing, is simply profanity. That law is the fetish worshipped by the capitalist, and the well-to-do! It is the shield behind which they screen their enormous greed, and under cover of which they manage to rob the poor, without losing their position in society, like ordinary thieves. It is an admirable doctrine for capitalists and the favoured few, who, either of themselves, or through the land-grabbing propensities of their ancestors, have undisputed possession of the soil. Where people are equally independent, or at least in no danger of starvation, it may regulate matters fairly enough. But

in such a case as Barbadoes, it is, as you say, nothing but a mockery."

"To have made the gift of freedom to the Barbadoes negro really valuable, the British Government—the power responsible for robbing him of his labour up till that time—should have allotted each family as much ground as, properly cultivated, would have kept them from actual starvation. That would have made the negro really, as well as nominally, free. He could then have stood out against injustice, and insisted on his right to fair wages."

"In compensating the slave-holder, instead of his victim, you think that the British Government made a slight mistake?"

"I think it would be difficult to find a queerer burlesque of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, than that furnished by the proceedings of the British Government. *Punch*, of course, did not see it, but that is not wonderful."

"Not at all," agreed Mat.

"The British Government," continued Evangeline, "finds a poor black man that has fallen among thieves; thieves of the most

atrocious and persistent character; thieves who have robbed him of his just wages, not for one day only, but for days in long and unbroken succession, days running to weeks, and months, and weary years. Worse still—these persistent robberies have been effected with violence, with the aid of cruel floggings, the horrors of which have echoed all round the civilized world.

“Here was an opportunity of emulating the Good Samaritan, of binding up the poor black man’s wounds, and pouring in oil and wine—an opportunity of using its powerful influence to enforce restitution, and make such arrangements as would ensure his protection and welfare in the future.

“Instead of which, with a strange perversity and moral blindness, utterly incomprehensible, it darts one short contemptuous glance at the wayside—and, will it be believed, proceeds to parley with the thieves—devoting its imperial powers to soothing their wounded feelings, forsooth, and deprecating their wrath. They are entirely wrong, it hastens to explain, both as to its intentions and motives. It is extremely sorry to have intruded at such

an inopportune moment. Nothing, it beseeches them to believe, but the sternest necessities of State could have forced it to interfere with the legitimate exercise of an honourable profession. But it really has no intention of hinting at the desirability of restitution. That, at least, is a mistake. There was, therefore, no necessity for scuttling off so rapidly. It has been altogether a wrong impression on their part,—a little natural, perhaps, under the circumstances, but, nevertheless, a mistake. The truth is, its sympathies are entirely with its friends—the—the—the gentlemen with whose lucrative business arrangements the necessities of State have compelled it to interfere. Far from thinking they should be compelled to make restitution, the B.G., looking at the matter from the loftiest imperial and moral standpoints, has arrived at the profound conclusion that they are entitled to a handsome compensation for the wholesome discipline,—the civilizing and evangelistic influences to which they have subjected the black man in the past—and for their magnanimous undertaking not to take the least advantage of him in the future. In

sterling proofs of which, as well as substantial tokens of its profound sympathy and distinguished consideration, the B.G. begs their acceptance of eight millions of dollars—an unexpected conclusion to the farce of the Good Samaritan—which is received by the thieves with a very broad, but very natural, grin.”

“Rather hard upon my good friends, the slave-holders,” said Mat, unable to keep from laughing at the appositeness of the illustration.

“I cited Barbadoes,” he continued, “as an illustration that they who hold the land in any country, where the supply of it is limited and the population dense, are in a position to dictate terms to the thousands and millions, who must either work for such wages as they choose to give, or starve.”

“Stated thus, you seem to lay down an axiomatic truth, and yet I hesitate to make the acknowledgment, dimly perceiving that, once granted, such an admission carries with it a long train of consequences that cannot be contemplated without politico-economic horror.’

"I suppose," said Mat smiling, "I must content myself with that half-hearted acknowledgment of the truth of my premises ;" continuing, "For Barbadoes, let us now substitute Germany, or, better still, Great Britain, also an island. Britain boasts that she is the very home of Liberty. Her poet proudly sings :—

They touch our country, and their shackles fall :

as if, in vision, he saw an oppressed world flocking to her shores !"

"A proud boast, but, I think, nobly earned. For do we not see refugees flocking to her shores from all quarters—Italy, Austria, Russia, France ?"

"Those that flee to her, as if she were a City of Refuge, are as nothing to the thousands that flee from her, as if she were the very City of Destruction."

"What a bitter speech. You look at England, as I have often told you, through Yankee spectacles."

"Possibly I do, but I will willingly be corrected, if I err, either in my facts, or inferences. I acknowledge, England has

done a great deal for Liberty. I see also, that for her upper, and a large portion of her middle classes, she is a most delightful country to live in. But I cannot help seeing that, for this luxury and happiness, her lower classes have to pay a fearful price, in misery and degradation."

"I think her upper classes would repudiate the connection."

"I have no doubt they would."

"They would say, doubtless, that the misery of the lower classes was entirely due to their vices, and that the splendid luxury in which they live was a reward conferred upon them by a beneficent Providence, for their conspicuous virtue. Altogether ignoring the fact, that had their ancestors, in some instances at least, not been conspicuous for the want of it, many of them might now be earning their bread, like honest folk."

"I have often wondered," said Evangeline, after some little interval, "why the French aristocracy, above all others in Europe, were singled out, for the tremendous outpouring of wrath visited upon them in the last century."

"The upper classes there," replied Mat,

“learned at an awful cost that the descendants of those who have profited by long centuries of cruel wrong and oppression, may be suddenly called upon, in their own persons, and those of their families, to settle to the uttermost farthing the long score that Nemesis has been silently but surely rolling up against them.”

“But why should Nemesis have visited the upper classes of France rather than the upper classes of England or Germany?”

“The elite of France,” replied Mat, “forgot that even ‘worms will turn,’ and, to their irrepressible horror, awoke to the awful conviction, that the worms, upon which they had been insolently treading, were in reality ‘Human Torpedoes.’

“As long,”—continued Mat, walking up and down, as he was in the habit of doing, when swayed by intense emotion—“As long as the outraged people that ministered to their luxury and happiness were merely half-starved, they groaned but submitted to their fate, as to something inevitable as the law of gravitation. Long continued impunity, however, had made the aristocracy reckless.

What had the chivalry of France to fear from a clodhopping peasantry? The fast young men wanted to go still faster! To provide the means it was necessary to 'grind' still farther 'the faces of the poor, already sharpened by the pangs of hunger, to the point of savagery.' And so, from the normal condition of half-starvation, it finally got down to three-quarters, and even seven-eighths-starvation, at which point the pressure upon the engine became too great, and society blew up like a Mississippi steamer."

CHAPTER IV.

QUESTIONS—THAT HAVE AN UGLY HABIT OF SETTLING THEMSELVES.

“Unquestionably our aristocratic manners and habits have made us, and the poor, two distinct and unsympathizing bodies. This is the plague spot, to my mind, in our whole state of society, which must be removed, or the whole must perish.”—
DR. ARNOLD.

“The prophets, in a similar state of society in Judaea, did not preach subordination only or chiefly—they denounced oppression and amassing overgrown properties, and grinding the labourers to the smallest possible pittance, and they denounced the Jewish high church party for countenancing all their iniquities and prophesying smooth things to please the aristocracy. The truth is, we are living amongst a population whom we treat with all the haughtiness and indifference that we could treat slaves.”—*Ibid.*

“THAT striking comparison,” Mr. Cuthbert, “in which you likened the outburst of the French Revolution to the blowing up of a Mississippi steamer, has haunted me for the whole week! But why, with such a condition of things as they have in England, has there been no similar blow up there?”

“The English aristocracy,” replied Mat,

“are much shrewder than the French. They do not go quite to the point of killing the geese that lay their golden eggs. They take great credit to themselves for their humanity in sparing their lives, and their extreme moderation in contenting themselves with the eggs and the entire feathers.”

“The wonder is that geese capable of laying golden eggs would submit to such outrageous treatment.”

“They cackle and protest very loudly at times, but so long as they confine themselves to cackling, the plucking process is not likely to be moderated. So long as there is a feather left, nothing short of a strictly belligerent attitude will enable them to keep it.”

“There were indications recently of just such an attitude.”

“A mere blowing off of steam, after which the Ship of State proceeded as usual. The English ruling classes are magnificent engineers, who understand their business and watch the engine closely. They have got the British labourer down to half-starvation point—nine shillings a week. But they have taken measures never to exceed this. Whenever

the pressure upon the engine indicates that this point is likely to be exceeded, the safety valve of the Poor House immediately opens, and continues open, until the point of danger has been safely passed."

"That safety valve has certainly worked admirably, during many a dangerous crisis, but it appears to me that there are symptoms of late that it begins to get out of order."

"I can foresee a point at which it will altogether cease to act. During this generation of stolid, uneducated, and, to a certain extent, therefore, stupid British peasantry, it will doubtless continue to do its work. But should they, who wish to make education universal, succeed, there will, year by year, be a greater horror of entering that House, by means of which philanthropic England contrives to extract from thousands of her sons, every vestige of that energy, and enterprise, and self-respect which constitute their manhood—contrives, out of Englishmen, to manufacture certain degraded things she terms 'paupers.' As the English workmen become educated and, consequently, more sensitive, the loathing attached to the term pauper will

increase more and more until an inevitable time arrives, when they will die, rather than enter its walls. *When this point is reached, society in England must be remodelled in the interests of justice, or this safety valve having ceased to act, it will blow up, as did that in France.*"

"A prediction which, I trust, may not be realised. England has always had the luck of finding statesmen equal to the solution of her knottiest problems."

"She has sometimes steered dangerously near to the sunken rocks, upon which other goodly vessels have been wrecked. Had it not been for that phenomenal growth of manufactures, which has postponed the evil day, the English labour problem, with the entire land in the possession of a few thousand elder sons, would long ago have reached a crisis. As it is, I consider that crisis merely postponed, not averted. The English labourer has yet to learn that which events have taught the negro in Barbadoes, that *any freedom which is not rooted in the soil, is merely a modified form of slavery.*"

"But how," asked Evangeline, "is the

difficulty to be remedied, where the soil is limited and the population immense."

"Oh," replied Mat, in a tone of biting irony, "nothing more easy. Once rid ourselves of the antiquated notion that the land in any country may possibly have been intended to furnish food and building sites for its people, and the matter presents no difficulties whatever. The question then resolves itself into how much you will devote to Grouse and Blackcock—how much to Pheasants and Partridges—how much to Rabbits and Hares—how much to Deer Parks—and how much to Pleasure Grounds."

"Such conditions are almost too awful for irony. People willing to labour—forced to leave the lands for which their forefathers have given their lives—and crowded into the alleys and slums—in order that there may be more room for Grouse and Blackcock—for Deer Forests and Pleasure Grounds. It is pitiful—it is pitiful. The love of the picturesque gone mad."

In a few moments she continued—"But how, in England for instance, where the population runs up into the millions, and the

soil itself is so very limited, can such a condition of things be remedied ? ”

“ In England,” replied Mat,” a few noble families have solved the difficulty—by dividing its millions of acres into a few great estates, and leaving the millions to shift for themselves—a solution exceedingly satisfactory to them, and the wisdom and justice of which they consider it the grossest profanity to question.”

“ It seems as if once a nation’s soil has been divided, no matter how unjustly, no possible good can come of reopening the question—that only trouble and disorder can result from any attempt to review a decision come to, even two generations since, not to say after the lapse of centuries.”

“ That which holds good of isolated cases of injustice in the apportionment of a nation’s soil, because required in the general interest of the entire owners—becomes, for the same reason, a monstrous injustice when applied—not to isolated cases—not to individual fields or estates—but to the entire soil of the country. Whether such a disposition of a nation’s lands should be reviewed, and when, is a question which those in possession must

settle for themselves. It will be unwise, however, should they overlook the important fact that, when postponed too long, such questions have an ugly habit of settling themselves; and that, not always in a sense entirely satisfactory to vested rights."

"That may be; but we must not forget that vested rights, dating from feudal times, are, nevertheless, the roots of our present civilization, and, therefore, dangerous to meddle with. It is, doubtless, exceedingly unfortunate that the entire soil of a country should be in the possession of a few thousand elder sons; but it is difficult to see how, without perpetrating great injustice, it can be remedied."

"You surely do not think that any one generation can have a right to make such a disposition of this little Planet, of which we are merely the tenants for a day, as shall absolutely exclude the rights of all coming generations; a few elder sons alone excepted."

"That seems to savour a little of presumption. We may possibly be entitled to sign away our own right and title to the soil upon which we find ourselves; but, being at the

utmost, merely as you say, life tenants, it seems like the grossest impertinence to arrogate to ourselves the power of signing away the right, title, and interest of *all the generations that shall come after us.*"

"And if," continued Mat, "no one generation can justly sign away the right, title, and interest in the soil of the generation which is to succeed it, what shall we say, when such a right has never been signed away, but simply usurped by force and fraud?"

"There! I seem to lose standing ground, and to find all the difficulties of the question reopened."

"I grant you the difficulties and exceeding complexity of the subject. I merely contend that these difficulties cannot be said to have received anything like a satisfactory solution, by the present arrangement—an arrangement under which the nation has permitted a few families to clutch the entire soil of England, and, taking unjust advantage of their position as legislators, to pass laws intended to keep that soil in their grip until the Day of Judgment. That, however, is no concern of mine, though, possibly, that day of judgment may

arrive a little sooner than they think, and in a form they little expect."

"This alone seems clear, that whilst the soil of England is in possession of a few thousands, the millions, as in Barbadoes, will be virtually at their mercy."

"It looks as if it would require a miracle to prevent it!"

"Whilst this condition remains, it appears to me that, between the manufacturer on the one hand, and the landowner on the other, the English labourer will be ground as between the upper and nether millstones."

"But why," asked Evangeline, "should you make the landowner responsible for the low wages given the labourer? Does not the farmer come between them, so that, except upon occasions of State, they seldom even come in contact—my Lord, living in an elevated heaven, with which there is no communication from the regions below?"

"That is, to my mind, the worst feature of the whole case. The misery and destitution, that people do not immediately see, affect them but little. By placing the farmers between themselves and the labourers, the

owners of great estates avoid the disagreeable incidentals, necessitated by any process of compelling work for starvation wages, and flatter themselves that they thus escape responsibility."

"This 'grinding of the faces of the poor' by deputy," continued Mat, waxing warm, "in order to obtain the luxuries of existence, or minister to an insane thirst for accumulation, arouses my indignation more than direct acts of oppression, committed in the struggle for existence, and in the endeavour to obtain its absolute necessities."

"I can see this grinding process working very clearly in the case of your cotton planters; but are you quite sure that the connection between the luxuries of the English landlords and the extreme poverty of the agricultural labourers is quite as close."

"I do not see how it could well be closer," replied Mat. "Upon our Southern plantations, you find a planter, two or three overseers, and a few hundred slaves. The planter avoids the disagreeable, but, as he thinks, necessary duty of cow-hiding his negroes, by devolving it upon an overseer. But you

surely would not argue that he thus escapes responsibility?"

"No! a thousand times, no! Rather would I argue that this brutalisation of another—this forcing another to do that from which his own feelings, none too delicate, lead him to shrink in disgust—were an aggravation of a revolting offence, committed against our common humanity."

"Exactly what I think myself. Now apply the same rule to circumstances slightly, not essentially, different. Upon English estates I find a lord, some score or so of farmers, and hundreds of labourers. I find the lord living in extravagant luxury, the farmer in moderate comfort, whilst the labourers, by hardest toil, can scarcely manage to keep soul and body together. Am I wrong in tracing, *in both cases*, this poverty to this luxury, and concluding the connection to be that of cause and effect?"

"The connection certainly seems very close. How it can be right, that they who do nothing should receive all, and they who do all should receive next to nothing, I confess I have not sufficient imagination to discover!"

“It has puzzled me, too. But I had the extreme good fortune to have my darkness enlightened the other day, and that by no less authoritative a personage than a literary lord.”

“It is a conundrum, of which I long to hear the solution.”

“This lord, evidently speaking for his class, claimed that he had as much right to be paid for his land, as the baker for his bread.”

“As much right! I should think so! In classifying his services along with those of the baker, he rated them much too modestly! For, it must be acknowledged that the ability to make land argues a much higher order of power than to make bread, besides opening up altogether new and brilliant possibilities for the future of the ‘tight little island!’ But, if he didn’t do this, and I have heard the credit of the work ascribed to a very different source, the argument of the noble lord appears to be a ‘*non sequitur*.’ ”

“The English people must have a different version of the Scriptures from that in use amongst us. We read, ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof.’ The English reading evidently gives the indefinite

article, or else alters the position of the apostrophe,”—a critical opinion delivered by commentator Mat, with a very grave face, but a very perceptible smile in his eyes.

“The fact that the English labourer should, under such circumstances, keep up the struggle, shows of what splendid material he is made. Taking your facts as correct, I cannot wonder at your considering the English landholders equally culpable with the landholders of your Southern States.”

“Not only equally culpable, but more so. Our Southern slavery has been a stepping-stone, by which the negro has ascended in the scale of civilisation. Between slavery—plus the chance of human sacrifice, as practised at Dahomey, or plus the chance of being eaten, as in the interior of Africa—and slavery as it is in Virginia; there is much that for the negro is clear gain. But to what higher condition, to what except pauperism has British slavery—a slavery slightly modified, so as to keep the promise of liberty to the ear, but break it to the heart—proved the stepping-stone?”

“Another conundrum,” said Evangeline;

then after a slight pause—"The consideration that, whilst all other classes have been so unmistakably rising, this lowest class has either remained stationary, or sunk still lower, is certainly an alarming one. But that English statesmen should look on with stupid, I had almost said brutal, indifference, satisfied that this is the best realisable condition of things, the '*ne plus ultra*' of the most advanced civilization, in the best and freest country under heaven, is to me, the most appalling fact of all."

"The condition of things," said Mat, "in which, by some law as inevitable, apparently, as the law of gravitation, the entire land of a country becomes the possession of a privileged few—is no new one. What is new is that no judgment has overtaken a country in which the divorce between the land and the people is as complete as we now see in England. The old prophet, who denounced a woe upon those who 'added house to house and field to field,' must have seen to the very roots of society. For that there is an immediate connection between huge estates and a degraded people I am firmly convinced. In the Northern

States our farms are small, the farmers very generally ploughing their own fields. The result is a stalwart and intelligent yeomanry, of whom any nation might be proud—and—liberty. In the South we have huge estates, splendid luxury—and—slavery. In the North we have as yet no extremes of society, all but a small fraction living in simple comfort. In the South we have at one extreme of society a planter—at the other, a slave. In England, also, they have huge estates. And, *like cause and effect*, you see at one extreme of society a lord—at the other, a pauper.”

“As you put it, the connection seems perilously close; but that the peer should necessarily involve the pauper is a startling hypothesis which I am scarcely prepared to admit.”

“Though you are quite open-eyed to the fact that the hereditary woes of the slave are involved in the hereditary splendours of the planter.”

“As to that I have no doubts whatever.”

“The links in the chain of causes may not in appearance be so closely welded in the one case as in the other; but that is the sole

difference. If this adding of house to house and field to field were merely a mild species of insanity,—say like the craze for the accumulation of old china,—and could be pursued with as little detriment to the neighbour, it were, if not quite a laudable enterprise, at any rate outside the range of prophetic denunciation. Set a man down in the midst of our illimitable prairies, and he might safely be left to indulge the passion at his own sweet will; but unfortunately the passion seems to rage just in the exact proportion in which it cannot be indulged without the direst results to society generally. In England, for instance, it is impossible to add house to house and field to field without of necessity leaving certain others—say with the faculty for accumulation less perfectly developed—without houses and without fields; a condition of society which can scarcely be considered perfectly satisfactory to the latter.”

“Though,” suggested Evangeline, “it may seem to the politico-economist flat blasphemy to question it.”

“Once questioned, it will be a ghost difficult to lay. The resources of intellects

trained in the subtle dialectics of Oxford or Cambridge may flash before the questioners in bewildering splendour, but they will fail utterly in the endeavour to demonstrate the proposition that, seen dispassionately and in the clear light of truth, *that is a strictly equitable division of the social wealth* which reserves the entire honey for the delectation of the drones—and—when their lordships have leisurely completed the work of extraction—*flings the empty comb to the working bees.*”

“I can quite see that in such an effort, even the most brilliant intellects are likely to be somewhat strained.”

“Not only strained,” said Mat, “but exceeding likely to snap—snap like the slender cords which bind such an unnatural society together.”

“It ought not,” said Evangeline, “to require a very keen perception to see that, in the last resort, the strength of a society is the strength of its basis, no more and no less, and that that basis *is necessarily its lowest class.*”

“A doctrine difficult to dispute, but not likely to be relished by those in possession of the fields. For, when these are all in

possession of the few and strictly entailed, *the few inevitably give laws to the many*—and, sooner or later, you will find at one extremity of the social scale that most perfect fruit of an advanced Christian civilization—*Hereditary Peers*; and at the other extremity that most lamentable fruit—*Hereditary Paupers*.”

“The actual fields, of which the good old prophet spoke, are not worth much in the ‘Real Estate’ market of to-day,” said Evangeline, a picture of the awful desolation of Palestine rising suddenly before her imagination.

“No!” said Mat, with energy, “the curses that fell upon them, from the lips of an outraged poor, have not yet been lifted! Though I can fancy how these ancient land-grabbers, as they stretched themselves upon their luxurious couches, or lay on their beds of ivory, discussing languidly the politics of the day, and quaffing in bowls the delicious wines of Palestine, laughed the old prophet’s predictions to scorn; I can imagine the wild exultation when, by special favour of some wicked king, or through influence with his unworthy

favourites, they succeeded in adding another, and still another, to their overgrown estates.

“And for a while it looked as if this adding of house to house and field to field, were the most legitimate of all earthly aspirations—the one great object of life to be aimed at and struggled for by every man of spirit—every man filled with the laudable ambition to found a family. Occasionally, indeed, some eccentric Judæan noble—visited with an uneasy sense of compunction, that perhaps this patent system for founding great families at the expense of the little ones, however agreeable to the then prevalent theories of political economy, might not be so entirely in harmony with the will of heaven—would urge attention to the denunciations of the Prophet; only, however, to find himself hooted at, and voted a mere theorist—a dreamer interested in things altogether outside the region of practical politics. And the existing social arrangements continued exactly as they had been for centuries. The fortunate possessors of the great estates died in peace, leaving to their descendants the lands they had proudly called by their own names; died, in the confident

belief that the then condition of society would end only with the world itself.

“And for generations the land continued to rise in value ; rose in value to an extent of which its original possessors, keen and shrewd as they were, never dreamed. For the population doubled, and quadrupled, and the value of the land increased in a more than equal ratio—a continually increasing population, continually decreasing the cost of cultivation, and swelling, to more than princely proportions, the margin of profit in Judæan fields. The cost of cultivation became, in fact, merely nominal ; the price of labour steadily becoming less and less, until a labourer could be bought for the price of a pair of shoes ; a state of things brought about by the high price of bread, and the natural working of the great law of Supply and Demand—a state of things, from the merely economic standpoint of the Judæan landlord, positively delectable.

“But just about this time it began to be whispered, in the inner circles of Assyrian diplomacy, that the stalwart yeomanry, who had long defended these fertile fields, and whose fierce prowess had so often driven back

the might of the invading foe, were at length extinct; and that this renowned kingdom, overflowing with riches, though full of fenced cities, horses, chariots, and all the newest and most ingenious of warlike engines, was, nevertheless, a kingdom—the glittering apex of which rested on a huge substratum of paupers and labourers, between whom, and the soil they tilled, the last thread of connection had been ruthlessly severed.

“It was the coveted opportunity for which they had long waited. That terrible cavalry, which we seem still to see on their bas-reliefs, were speedily in motion. The hour so long foreseen by prophetic eyes had at length arrived. The small standing army of Judæa was no match for the forces brought into the field by the Colossus of the North. A short and sharp struggle; and then, vainly calling upon a miserable peasantry, from whom they had contrived to extract every vestige of manhood, to rise and resist the Assyrian invader, the Judæan nobles were swept into a captivity and a slavery they certainly most richly deserved.”

CHAPTER V.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES BUILT RIGHT OVER SLUMBER- ING FIRES.

“What between the landed aristocracy, and the moneyed aristocracy, the interests of the productive classes are generally sure to go to the wall—and this goes on for a time, till at last the squeeze gets intolerable, and then the productive classes put up their backs, and push in their turn so vigorously that rank and property get squeezed, in their turn, against the wall opposite.”
—DR. ARNOLD.

“Those wild creatures will permit other beasts to partake of their food after they themselves are satisfied; and they will even invite by signs, those of a different species, after their own present wants are supplied; but, on the contrary, see these man-monsters, wallowing in luxuries, and thousands of their own species starving with cold and hunger.”—I. I.

AFTER some preliminary skirmishing upon the subject of American slavery, deftly turned in accordance with conversational tactics, in the practice of which Mr. Cuthbert was now an adept, he said, “I am convinced that the European labour question, and that of American slavery, are one and the same problem.”

“I know,” said Evangeline smiling, “that that is a pet theory of yours.”

“It is in both cases, the old, old problem, as to whether some people are not of inherently better quality than others, and whether these latter do not exist solely in order to minister to the gratification and convenience of the former.”

“Those Royal families, with whom it was a prime article of belief that the people existed for their benefit, and not they for the benefit of the people, have had some pretty sharp lessons read them to the contrary.”

“But what a sysiphean task the believers in pure and simple justice have before them ! Of what use being at infinite pains and trouble to knock such whimsies out of the heads of Kings and Royal Families, only to find that they have taken refuge in the heads of those who style themselves the upper classes.”

“The upper classes forget, I am afraid, that expelled demons are somewhat dangerous guests to entertain.”

“You mean, I suppose, that they have been known to precipitate their hosts over steep places into the sea ”

“If the rising sense of justice, which begins

to surge within humanity, can no longer tolerate such fantasies in Kings, it may be expected to make short and sharp work with what became even wilder fantasies, when urged by those who are simply subjects themselves.

“The most discouraging thing is that many of those who were fiercest in repelling such assumptions upon the part of Kings, to-day assume, in their august persons, the self-same attitude.”

“Of which,” said Evangeline, with a mischievous light in her eyes, “a certain Republic, affords the most conspicuous example on record! With what vehemence you repelled poor King George’s pretensions! What scorn you poured upon his assumption of a divine right to reign! And how determinedly you have taken up the self-same attitude towards a whole race!”

This was a sudden and unexpected home-thrust, difficult to parry. But Mat was equal to the emergency. “In that particular,” said he, “we resemble, I suppose, the Barons, who wrung Magna Charta from the feeble hands of King John, never for a moment

imagining that their despised serfs could have part or lot in it. But they did a good work, nevertheless ;” he continued with increasing emphasis, “*and so did we.*”

“It is very dispiriting, nevertheless, to reflect that instead of being the result of pure and disinterested effort, the steps taken by Humanity, in its march upward from the dreary depths of barbarism, have been gained, one by one, through the miserable collision of selfish interests.”

“Pure and disinterested effort,” replied Mat, with one of his dry smiles, “is, I am afraid, a little foreign to human nature. The genius of Humanity has had to fight its battles with whatever weapons the chances of time and circumstance afforded : confined to the poor material which this Planet has hitherto furnished—its successes are the more extraordinary—seen, indeed, to border on the miraculous !”

“Each age, nevertheless, has given birth to men of inherent nobility of character ; men apt to see, and quick to take advantage of any collision of selfish interests, calculated to forward the great cause of the commonweal.”

“Of that there can be no doubt.”

“We can see clearly that the car of progress moves ; but we had better not examine, too microscopically, the motives of those who are pushing the wheels. No ! let us be satisfied to extend to them from a distance the tribute of our respectful admiration. Whatever, for instance, our sins towards the black race—in the uplifting of the white race—we are now the prime factor. We have secured, for their use and service, an entire continent. And we even keep a second in reserve. This continent we have consecrated as a field, upon which, free from the entangling complications of kings and aristocracies, the great question of white labour can be quietly wrought out and brought to a happy issue.”

“I am afraid you will find coloured labour as entangling a complication as either kings or aristocracies. But,” looking up demurely, “in the solution of that interesting question, you have unusual advantages. You are at liberty to supplement your own, with the still vaster stores of England’s accumulated wisdom.”

“If England,” said Mat, in a tone of in-

tense irritation, "would only mind her own business, and put her own house in order first, instead of giving herself so much unnecessary concern about the disorder in ours."

"Perhaps," suggested Evangeline, "she is conscience-stricken; knowing that the beginning of this disorder dates from a time when she herself was the recognized house-keeper."

"If I could only think that, I might be able to summon up greater charity, where she is concerned."

"As for what you term her own business, she affects the most utter unconsciousness of there being anything but the most perfect order and harmony in her entire domestic arrangements."

"England's labour problem is complicated by the fact that a very large proportion of those most deeply affected by it—her paupers—a term, as used by Englishmen, conveying a sense of such deep contempt that I would not use it, could it be avoided—have sunk into such an abject and dehumanised condition, that special remedial measures are first of all required to raise them to the level of manhood."

“Strange,” said Evangeline, musingly, “that a nation, distinguished for intelligence and public spirit, can contemplate such a condition of things with entire unconcern! The only thing that enables me to understand it is that your countrymen are as completely apathetic with regard to what, in our European eyes, is a much graver one.”

“The apathy with us is apparent rather than real. It is merely a thin crust. Underneath, as is proved whenever the subject is even remotely alluded to; there is plenty of slumbering fire.”

“A much more hopeful condition of things than the other. With you, it does look as if the fires underneath were gathering strength for an upheaval that would level mountains that now look as if they would last for ever.”

“My good southern friends scout the idea of the non-eternity of slavery. They feel much surer of its eternity than their own. It always has been they argue, and always will be. It is difficult for us to believe, and apparently as easy for us to forget, that there are forces in nature to whom it is mere play to upheave or level those mountains,

which to us are the very symbols of strength and stability."

"Your social structure resting upon slavery, and our social structure resting upon caste, have this disagreeable feature common to both. The rocks upon which they rest are mainly volcanic. They are, in fact, built right over slumbering fires, though possibly the intervening crust is not quite so thin in some particular places as in others."

"As, for instance, in our Southern States. Though the ground there is believed to be very solid, they do have an occasional shake.

"There is," said Evangeline, "a certain occult force pent up within humanity, that has a strength of which people little dream. And yet, every now and again, like the uneasy giants buried beneath Pelion and Ossa, it suddenly rouses itself, and makes these social structures of ours, which we think strong as the everlasting hills, rock and reel to their very foundations."

"How any one can read history," said Mat, "without seeing that that is the great lesson to which its continually recurring convulsions ever point I cannot imagine, and yet because cases

like the French Revolution, when the disgusted earth opens and swallows up the dominant class, are *rare, or have been rare hitherto*, those who trample down their fellow-men think the risk they run scarcely worth consideration."

"So long as the molten lava is just beneath," said Evangeline, "it cannot but be dangerous to dance as some of them are doing just now, particularly in places where the crust is so evidently thin."

"The wonder is," said Mat, "that though some of the dancers every now and again drop through the crust, little or no impression seems to be made on their associates. There is something very mysterious in the fact that all social upheavals are so soon, and apparently so entirely, forgotten."

"Those who forget them are like those foolish people living in the neighbourhood of Vesuvius. Before the burning lava has well cooled they are busy rebuilding their little houses upon the selfsame spots, convinced that the eruption was a mere accident, and, that in any event, another is not likely to happen in their time."

“I think that had I a house in that neighbourhood, I could not help having an uncomfortable feeling when I happened to glance in the direction of Herculaneum and Pompeii.”

“It seems to me,” said Evangeline, smiling, “that you have a house just in that very vicinity; and that, under the circumstances, you are wonderfully cool. Still, as you say, a question which cannot be referred to without provoking excitement, cannot be considered dead.”

“It is certainly an exceedingly lively corpse, as any one may discover by a short trip to the Southern States. Let him, when down there, breathe the faintest whisper of suggestion that the peculiar institution is not quite perfect, and he will speedily discover that it is the liveliest subject he ever attempted to handle. The difficulty with us is of quite another character—a difficulty in touching it at all, without fanning smouldering fires that break out in every direction.”

“A difficulty utterly unlike that under which they labour in England. For it seems impossible for English statesmen so to strike

the pauper question as to evoke the faintest spark of fire."

"The United Kingdom and the United States are sinners of two entirely different types. We are sinners,—loud, blustering, bullying sinners if you will,—but, at any rate, we know it, and have at least the grace that we do not pose as saints. But the trouble with John Bull is, that he is deeply imbued with a persuasion of his own saintliness and perfection. You cannot take up an English magazine or review without seeing that he contemplates himself, both politically and socially, with the most supreme self-satisfaction. He thanks God every day that he is not as other men,—wicked Frenchmen, for instance, or atheistical Germans,—but particularly, and more especially, that he is not like theseslave-holding Democrats—the Americans. His is a land of Bibles and Liberty! From his own standpoint John Bull is truth-loving, self-sacrificing, and philanthropic to such a degree, that it is an unceasing cause of profound wonder and astonishment to himself. Like Burns' 'Holy Willie,' the Englishman is 'a burnin' and a shinin' licht to a' this place,' by

place, meaning this little planet of ours, which his piety alone prevents from being burned up."

"How savagely you do attack England! You seem to see no beauty in her whatever!"

"It is because England so arrogantly calls attention to her beauty and perfections that I have no patience with her. She is continually posing before the world, as if she were justice and loveliness personified. But let us tear aside this beautiful mask. As against the beauty of those English homes, which has become proverbial, let us set the poverty and squalor of those—'homes' shall we call them?—in which live her labouring poor. I grant you that her country seats, her lawns, her parks, her palaces, are indeed things to go into raptures over—a very paradise for those who own them. But what is the condition of the great bulk of her population? Every thirteenth family beggars, and every tenth family continually trembling on the verge of beggary. This, too, in a country into which the entire wealth of the world seems to be precipitating itself."

"I do not wonder at your strong expressions. Were such a condition of society that

of a country where the conquerors were insolently lording it over the conquered, it would be horrible enough. But to see those of the same flesh and blood stamping on each other in such brutal fashion, and yet all the while maintaining a general look of innocence and pious unconsciousness, is more unnatural still."

"It certainly has an ugly look, and makes me wonder what English literary snobs can mean when they prate so loudly about the *wholesome influence of rank and station*."

"You express yourself too vehemently, my dear sir. Is it possible that you can look around you without being everywhere struck by the wholesome influence of rank and station?"

"I might," replied Mat, with a droll face, "ascribe all the sweetness and wholesomeness of European society to the influence of rank and station, and yet credit them with exceedingly little. It requires a powerful magnifying glass to discover the presence of either the one or the other."

"There, I think, your democratic leanings make you unfair. But let that pass. The

influence of rank and station is not likely to be exerted in a direction calculated to undermine its privileges. And yet when I note how enthusiastically English statesmen hail the rising star of liberty in every country but their own, I cannot help wondering as to their mental attitude with regard to that most unnatural conjunction of extreme and degrading poverty with almost fabulous wealth *to be seen at their very doors.*"

"Their attitude appears to me," said Mat, "one of pure dismay. They are surprised that having taken measures entitling every English citizen to the privileges of that noble institution, the workhouse, these citizens do not forthwith bloom and develop into enterprising and self-respecting members of society. Having done their duty so fully, the degradation that is the only apparent result, must of course be ascribed to some unfathomable cause, the English equivalent for the will of Heaven."

"The fact," said Evangeline, "that arrangements intended to be purely beneficent, should, in their actual working, undermine the most essential foundations of manhood, and stamp out all aspirations after self-help, should

surely prompt the inquiry, whether, after all, the resources of statesmanship have been quite exhausted."

"English statesmen," said Mat, "educated in the belief that their institutions are as near perfection as things can be, in this sublunary sphere, are driven to find the reason of the squalor and wretchedness that persist in cropping to the surface everywhere, *in some essential difference between themselves and the lower classes*. If, for instance, the working classes were only as sober, as self-denying, and as virtuous as their noble selves, would not everything be well?"

"I am afraid," replied Evangeline, "that even if the working classes did contrive to mount to those moral heights where repose the elect of the world, the gain in either sobriety, or self-denial, or virtue, would scarcely be apparent."

"Exactly what I think myself; but this theory of the drunkenness and inherent viciousness of the working classes is a delightful salve to the complacency and self-righteousness of the classes above them, when, from their empyrean heights, they contemplate

the wretchedness and degradation below. Besides, if not owing to some inherent moral difference between the lower classes and themselves, there is only one alternative. It must then be owing to undue pressure of social regulations, calculated to exalt the one and degrade the other. But this, of course, is impossible. English statesmen are firmly convinced that between this degradation and misery, and their laws and institutions, there is no essential connection. And yet, in all other matters, they are keen in tracing up evils to their sources, and prompt in devising appropriate remedies. They are not in the least sympathy with that stupid superstition which ascribes cholera to the will of Heaven."

"The light," said Evangeline, "that science is now shedding upon such subjects is of so fierce and searching a character, that the retention of such superstitions as regards the diseases of the physical body is no longer possible. But the ignorance that still prevails upon all social questions is of such a dense and tenebrious character, as to allow this selfsame idea to be readily entertained as regards the diseases of the social body. The origin of

these is less apparent. It lies concealed amidst certain social phenonema which the eyes of statesmen have not yet been trained to see, and to the recognition of which, when seen, the remnant of old Adam, still lurking in their celestial natures, renders them exceedingly averse."

"The remnant of that old Adam," said Mat, "is an unknown quantity difficult to guess. Still, the idea of a social body is something so exceedingly simple and elementary that one need not despair of ultimately making it clear to the apprehension of a modern statesman."

"If the idea that the state is really, and to all intents and purposes, a social body, had only penetrated the minds of thinking people, how it would smooth the path of every reform!"

"The minds of thinking people," replied Mat, bluntly, "are so permeated with the feelings of caste, that such ideas glance off them like bullets off a crocodile."

"But even crocodiles are not altogether impervious "

"Not altogether. Even crocodiles have their weak spots, but they are exceedingly difficult to find."

“And the representatives of the thinking people, what of them?”

“Their representatives,” replied Mat, “are even less perviews to such ideas than they are themselves. In matters of legislation they represent the interests of those who elect them. Their solicitude with reference to everything affecting the health and comfort of horses, cattle, sheep, or swine partakes of a tenderness and a devotion—of an enthusiasm, indeed, that is truly affecting. If,” he exclaimed wistfully, “it were only possible to carry a little of the keen zest with which they discuss the most distant approaches of rinderpest into discussions affecting the health and comfort of their unhappy brethren in the slums and alleys!

“The capability of rising into enthusiasm, where merely cattle are concerned, surely argues the possibility of rising into that higher condition, the ‘enthusiasm of humanity.’ But until statesmen become permeated with that feeling, the idea of the State being a social body will be merely a phrase, good enough to round a period at election times, but of entirely too dim and nebulous a cha-

racter to serve as a base for special legislation.

“In believing that nothing ever originated without a cause, the English statesman makes a mental reservation of pauperism; that, he is inclined to attribute to the mysterious perversity inherent in sublunary things. It has sprung up he knows not how, and continues he knows not why, unless for the purpose of plaguing him, and increasing an already troublesome poor rate.”

“English statesmen are too deeply saturated with the feelings and prejudices of their caste to be able to grapple effectively with the difficulties of a subject, the saddest features of which can only be comprehended by such as are deeply touched with a feeling of their common humanity. It will be a long time before the high caste Brahmin becomes keenly sensitive to the sufferings and hardships of the despised Pariah! To rise so far out of themselves as to feel the degradation and suffering involved in being born and brought up a pauper, as keenly as if the sufferer were a being in all respects identical with their noble selves, is a moral height to which proud

Normans have insuperable difficulties in climbing.

“It certainly is as far as possible from the thoughts of an English statesman that the beginning, middle, and final causes of pauperism are identical with those causes which have produced that monument of æsthetic culture, himself.”

“Human nature being what it is,” said Evangeline, “it would be strange if that should appear to him a strictly axiomatic truth.”

“That I grant you. The man who can see clearly the opposite side of a case in which his own pockets are deeply interested, is a species of saint, which we have not yet managed to acclimatise.”

“A very cynical speech,” replied Evangeline. “I cannot,” said she, warmly, “think of any definition of honesty in which that is not involved.”

“But this is a rare kind of honesty, that must not be confounded with the ordinary kind. Men see things affecting their own interests microscopically. But a sufficiently powerful glass to bring those distant matters affecting other men’s interests within the

narrow radius of their vision, does not seem to have been invented yet."

"A glass of just that description was invented in Palestine some eighteen centuries since. It brings other people's interests so near, that they are interests to live and die for."

"I have heard of such glasses. They are supplied, I believe, at certain stores, known to the heretical as gospel shops. But if so, there must be some radical defect in the instruments now manufactured. The lenses in these are so adjusted as to enable those looking through them to see what they term their souls' interests with the same microscopic minuteness as the interests of their more material parts. Their owners simply extend that horrible selfishness which distinguishes, or I should rather say, characterises them in their relations to the things of time, so as to include the things of eternity as well. That, in fact, is almost the sole difference I can discern between the nineteenth century saint and the nineteenth century sinner. The one, even when convinced—a rare thing—that he *has* a soul to be saved, treats the

matter with contemptuous indifference. The other differs from his neighbours in believing he has a soul; but the only evidence he furnishes of the fact, is his ingenuity in devising measures that will forward his spiritual interests without doing the least damage to his material ones."

"Every good invention is sure to be imitated and counterfeited. The instrument of which I speak—patented in Galilee, and bringing other people's interests so near that they are interests to live and die for—may be readily distinguished by a peculiar trade mark—never counterfeited in the past, and not likely, I think, to be counterfeited in the future. Each glass bears upon it in large letters, in the handwriting of the inventor, the mysterious words, 'Whosoever will save his life, *shall lose it.*'"

"If that is the case," said Mat, with an expressive shrug of his broad shoulders, "it is a glass never likely to be in much demand. And yet without a glass of somewhat similar properties, toned down, say, to every day nineteenth century requirements, it seems difficult to see how people's eyes can be opened to certain very glaring facts. It will, for instance,

require a glass of considerable illuminating power to bring out into clear light the fact to which I just now referred—that England's paupers are as certainly the product of circumstances, and the result of special legislation, as that superb fruit upon which she prides herself—her noble Lords."

"It should not, I think, require extraordinary keenness of vision to see that it is impossible to make special laws in the interests of the few, without, to the same extent, discriminating against the interests of the many."

"Possibly not. So long as it is merely a general phrase, it is only a loaded gun, lying harmlessly by. But raise it, and take aim at something. Say, for instance, that it was *impossible* to convey to a few families the entire soil of England, without, by the same act, virtually making serfs and paupers of the rest, and you state a proposition to which no noble lord, however philosophic, philanthropic, or scientific, can be expected to subscribe."

"As the imperfections of our neighbours require no magnifying glass to bring them within the range of vision, he would perhaps

admit more readily that that was the reason why, in the tenth century, nearly the entire people of France were serfs.

“A proposition so innocent looking as that might possibly be assented to. It would, however, be like swallowing a hook. For once admitted, it would be difficult to deny that—special circumstances excepted—similar causes would, in neighbouring countries, produce similar effects.”

“It certainly would,” Evangeline agreed, “be open to that objection.”

“One might then point to a period of England’s history, when, instead of emphasising the truth of his remarks, by saying as he does now, ‘May I be damned,’ the more emphatic oath of the proud Norman was, ‘May I—become an Englishman.’”

And here Mat seemed to be struck with a sudden sense of the ludicrous. For he first chuckled, and then laughed right out. And Evangeline, though not absolutely sure whether she ought to laugh or not, found it impossible to resist joining him. But soon recovering herself, she exclaimed in a voice full of pity, “Of how much deep contempt on

the one side, and deep degradation on the other, that seems to tell us!"

"It enables us to comprehend that awful statement of a great historian that the English peasantry were then "upon a level with the swine and oxen which they tended."

"Such a statement seems conclusive proof that it *was* impossible to convey to a few families the entire soil of England without making serfs and paupers of the rest. But what an immeasurable improvement has taken place in the condition of the people of England since then!"

"That is, I know, the general impression. And, thanks to the rise of her manufactures and commerce,—a contingency the land-stealers did not contemplate, and for which they certainly deserve no credit,—numbers of the English people have managed, in the long course of centuries, to drag themselves from beneath the Norman harrow. But those, to whom no such way of escape has been opened, are there still! Those, who to-day till the glorious soil of England, are still drinking the same cup of deep degradation and poverty

—still toiling as hopelessly and helplessly as at the period to which the historian refers. Upon them the Normans seem to have fastened themselves like the bull-dogs they admire so much, for—after the lapse of centuries—they still retain their grip.”

“Are you sure, Mr. Cuthbert, that you are not exaggerating? It seems inconceivable that that should still be the case, after such an unprecedented period of prosperity and power as England has since enjoyed! When one thinks of the enormous increase in the value of England’s soil, and of the fortunes realized by its owners from the sale of building sites, and the extraction of coal and iron,—fortunes representing sums that appear almost fabulous,—it seems inconceivable that some few drops of this golden stream should not have trickled down to ameliorate the condition of the poor labourer, the direct cause of it all.”

“The labourer has, indeed,” replied Mat, “been standing all this time in the midst of a golden stream; but not one drop, so far as I can see, has been allowed to pass his lips. Take, for example, the Dorsetshire labourer, whose wages

in this year of grace, 18—, are some eight shillings a week,—a sum barely sufficient to keep his own body and soul together, not to speak of the souls and bodies of a frequently numerous family—not to speak of their necessities in the matter of clothes and education,—and then say whether 'if not 'still upon a level with the swine and oxen which he tends,' his material conditions have been ameliorated *in anything like the same ratio as theirs.*

“Take any of the now celebrated breeds of English swine and cattle,—better still, those found in Dorset itself,—and in imagination contrast them with their lean and raw-boned progenitors of the Norman period. The difference is something marvellous—a difference showing conclusively how much good housing, careful and choice feeding, and unremitting attention and care, can, and will do, towards refining and improving the breed *of even brute beasts.*

“So much for what British capital and intelligence has achieved for the swine and oxen of the Norman period!

“Now for the second contrast. Take the Dorsetshire labourer as the typical English

peasant, subjected during the long course of centuries to purely agricultural as distinguished from manufacturing influences. And as companion picture, place alongside of him the poor, shambling pauper, who in the revolutions of English industry, agricultural and manufacturing, has been thrown aside as *so much human waste*.

“With either of these contrast the swineherd of the Norman period, and say wherein his descendants have progressed either physically, mentally, or morally.”

CHAPTER VI.

LAWS WHICH HAVE ENABLED THE NORMANS TO
RETAIN THEIR GRIP FOR OVER EIGHT CENTURIES.

“Briton’s Church bears, and has ever borne, the marks of her birth; the child of regal and aristocratical selfishness and unprincipled tyranny, she has never dared to speak boldly to the great, but has contented herself with lecturing the poor.”—

DR. ARNOLD.

“You recommend that we do something to change the lot of the black man! Why should *he* not be content, if God has given him that lot? Why do you wish to change it? Have you not an equal right to be dissatisfied with the hard lot of the white slave? You say that God has given him that hard lot as best for him, and yet you want to mend God’s work with the black, but not with the white slave. The black slave, who is *not* allowed to die of hunger, *you* can sympathize with, but the white slave may die uncared for.”—*Old Letter*.

MR. CUTHBERT’S striking contrast between the heroic efforts of Englishmen to develop the latent fine points, and improve and refine the breed of the swine and oxen of the Norman period, and their sadly unheroic and melancholy neglect to develop the latent fine points, and refine and elevate the breed of the equally helpless peasantry who tended them, was succeeded by an expressive silence.

“It seems very difficult,” said Evangeline, resuming the conversation, “to see why that tidal wave of prosperity, which has lifted the average condition of the English people so much above the old watermark, should not have influenced to an equal extent the fortunes of the peasantry also.”

“That tidal wave has affected, firstly and chiefly, the trading, manufacturing, and mercantile classes; and secondly, though in a much less marked degree, the mechanics, operatives, and miners. The agricultural labourer, in counties where there are no manufactures,—such as Dorset,—has not, so far as I can discern, been affected by it at all.”

“Not at all.”

“Possibly,” replied Mat, with the nearest approach to a sneer of which his handsome face was capable, “possibly it may have resulted in an extra blanket doled out at Christmas time to his rheumatic wife, or in a bottle of old port, when his family was suffering from some low fever, the result of damp walls and a prolonged continuance of low diet. That tidal wave of prosperity

which has enriched the owners of those fair fields ‘beyond the dreams of avarice,’ may, through the medium of that church which loves him so much, and guards his interests so well, have left at the labourer’s door those touching memorials of its passage. But if so, this large-hearted munificence must in no case be construed as a right. It is, on the contrary, an unmerited expression of gracious condescension and heavenly charity! Should the fortunate receiver fail to render, in due measure, the expected incense of gratitude, the disgusted squire is certain to subside into an incurable misanthrope for the remainder of his natural life.”

“I should think you would be ashamed to give such a colouring to those beautiful pictures of squirearchial munificence which English novelists never tire of holding up to an admiring world! But, be that as it may, I still find it difficult to understand why the English labourer’s wages should not have kept pace with the general improvement of the country.”

“The wonder, to my mind, is not that the condition of the British labourer is not

much better, but rather that it is not much worse."

"Why, in Heaven's name, should it be expected to become worse?"

"Because the natural tendency is in that direction. The divorce of the English labourer from the soil he tills is so complete and thorough—thanks to landlord legislation—that no increase in its saleable worth, neither increase in the product of his labour, nor increase in its market value, has any, even the most remote, effect upon his wages."

"Still," contended Evangeline, "the enormous increase in the value of all three is, at least, no reason why these wages should become less."

"The labourer's wages have a natural tendency to become less, owing to the beneficent operation of the law of Supply and Demand, which of course acts in England exactly as it does in Barbadoes. The fact that the negroes in Barbadoes have increased some twenty thousand, whilst the cultivated area of land remains at the same point as at the period of emancipation,—some seventy thousand acres,—has of course no tendency to

lessen, in any degree, the firm grip that the planters have on each man, woman, and child in the island."

"The addition of some thousands of labourers to such a very small island, must make it a difficult matter for the negroes to maintain the old rate of wages, much less better themselves."

"Exactly what we see in England, where an addition of some millions to the population has had the effect of placing the labourer, more hopelessly than ever, beneath the heel of his employer."

"With the entire laws of England carefully framed, so as to discriminate against them in every instance, where their interests and those of their employers came into collision, the unprotected English peasantry would long ago have been swept from off the earth, had it not been for the operation of two causes, largely partaking of the nature of accidents—the sudden and altogether wonderful expansion of English manufactures, and the equally phenomenal escape of continually increasing thousands through the strait gate of emigration."

“That argument has, I think, two sides. After all, the great growth of England’s population only dates back about a century. Before that time, with English liberty and a small population, what was there to prevent the English peasant from bettering his condition?”

“What I have already alluded to; the strong arm of the law, administered and made by his philanthropic masters, sitting in the two Houses of Parliament.

“A Parliament in which he had no voice! What a sickening illustration of the power of selfishness,—the chivalry of England making laws, not for the purpose of helping a miserable peasantry, but for the express purpose of preventing them from rising!

“Whenever the laws of Supply and Demand showed a perverse tendency to work in some other than that heaven given direction, which tended to keep wages low and the masters’ pockets comfortably filled, the powers of both King and Parliament were invoked to bring such an impious and unnatural condition of things to an end.”

“Is it not melancholy,” asked Evangeline,

her gentle eyes filled with indignation, "that hitherto the law-making powers have been invoked almost solely in the interests of those strong enough to dispense with their help, and that whenever some scheme tending to benefit the condition of the helpless has been so much as broached, there has been an immediate outcry, an indignant protest against what is contemptuously termed a foolish attempt to interfere with the action of economic laws. I think the poor English worms, over whom the wheels of civilization have so ruthlessly rolled, might have been permitted the luxury of turning themselves."

"Despite the disadvantages under which they laboured, there were occasions when they did turn, and, wriggling up to their lords and masters, requested an increase of wages."

"History tells us that upon one memorable occasion they mustered courage to humbly petition that they might be given such an increase of wages as would permit of the presence of a little beef at their Sunday's dinner."

"A very moderate request, surely. Such a slight infusion of luxury into their dietetic

arrangements could scarcely be considered enervating either morally or physically."

"Don't you see," asked Mat, "that though a specious request, it was an exceedingly dangerous precedent? It would have been an admission of the thin end of a wedge, which, in the interest of sound morals and a plain diet, both Lords and Commons considered it their bounden duty to prevent. Had the British peasant been allowed meat once a week, the very spirit of luxury and insubordination might have taken possession of him! Oh no! Had he been a Virginian negro, he would have mutinied immediately, at the slightest attempt to institute an unnatural divorce between the hog and hominy of his daily diet. But being only an Englishman,—though entitled to the privilege of carrying his country's flag into every corner of the world,—he was not, in the opinion of Lords or Commons, entitled to the slightest morsel of his country's beef."

"That," said Evangeline, with deep disgust imprinted on every feature of her expressive countenance, "was with a vengeance 'muzzling the ox that treadeth out the corn.' And, I

suppose, in such queer forms does selfishness disguise itself, that, in coming to that conclusion, both Lords and Commons firmly believed that they were acting as became wise and far-seeing conservators of England's greatness."

"I have no doubt they went home in the firm belief that they had saved England. It never once occurred to them that they had been framing 'iniquity into a law,' *legislating* so as to thrust down the British labourer once more to a 'level with the swine and oxen he tended.'"

"If freedom did not mean emancipation from slavery, if it did not mean that the British peasant was entitled to the highest wages he could get, what on earth did it mean? He could not surely be legislated into serfdom again."

"Nominally," replied Mat, "he could not; virtually, he was. His masters legislated him into a condition strictly equivalent, except in this one respect: they took good care that it should be a serfdom unalleviated by any grants of land,—as in barbaric Russia,—that it should be a serfdom in which all the advantages should be on their side. For they

delegated to the magistrates of each county entire power to fix the rate of wages."

"I do not see that this should have been such a very one-sided arrangement. In fixing the rate of wages, wise and humane magistrates would take into consideration the price of flour, and the least amount upon which a labourer and his family could be comfortable."

Mat laughed a scornful laugh. "When doves," said he, "can be entrusted to the keeping of hawks, when sheep can be safely handed over to the keeping of wolves, then, and not till then, will it be safe to hand over to masters, or to magistrates appointed by masters, the power of fixing labourers' wages. What the magistrates seem to have studied in this instance was the lowest possible sum that would enable the labourer to keep soul and body together. For I find that in 1685 the Warwickshire justices fixed wages at three shillings and sixpence a week in winter, and four shillings a week in summer. This was considered about the average rate, though in particular counties the magistrates fixed them at six shillings in winter and seven shillings in summer—very nearly high watermark with

the Dorsetshire labourer of to-day. At this time wheat was seventy shillings a quarter. So as meat was out of the question, and wheaten bread an impossibility, how the English labourer and his family contrived to exist is a conundrum I find it impossible to solve."

"I certainly can see no difference between slavery and such a system," said Evangeline in a tone of deep disgust, "except this: that, under cover of an iniquitous law passed by the masters sitting in the two Houses of Parliament, they were enabled to fix such a rate of wages as virtually cheated the labourer out of half his victuals and all his clothes. They do not, of course, have any such laws in England now."

"They may be on the Statute Book yet, for anything I know to the contrary. But, the population of England having trebled since that time, their help can be dispensed with. Wages are now regulated beautifully—at least, entirely to the satisfaction of the ruling classes—by the more scientific law of Supply and Demand. In this year of our Lord, 18—, we see the Dorsetshire labourer

in a condition not essentially different from that of 1685, or that of the villeins in the second century of the Norman Conquest."

"Are you sure, Mr. Cuthbert, that that conclusion is not exaggerated—that, in coming to it, you have been guided strictly by the evidence, and in no degree by your prejudices? I was reading only lately a jubilant article, telling of the unprecedented improvement that had taken place in England in the condition and comforts of every class."

"I do not doubt it in the least," replied Mat. "In forming estimates of their prosperity, the English very conveniently leave the condition of the very poor entirely out of the estimate."

"It seems to me that the condition of its lowest class is the only true criterion by which the real prosperity of a country can be ascertained."

"Tried by that criterion, I can see nothing in either the material or moral condition of England to be jubilant about. I can see nothing for congratulation in the fact, that, despite the enormous prosperity of which they boast, one-thirteenth of the entire population

is, nevertheless, in good years, in receipt of parish relief."

"So that virtually eight families in every hundred are so circumstanced, that, however great the general prosperity, there is not the remotest chance of their being benefited by it. And how about bad years?"

In bad years that unhappy thirteenth is increased to a tenth. But that, of course, is a trifling matter. To the upper classes it merely means a slight increase in the poor rate. It is astonishing how philosophically we can contemplate the wretchedness of the multitude from within the snug retreat of a tasteful villa, or the pleasant surroundings of a palace. The Christian, in such circumstances, shows a complacency and an apathy that even a Turk would vainly endeavour to emulate."

"And that is the condition of things about which the English sing pæans."

"The English look at it from a different standpoint. They consider that they are advancing with gigantic strides. And they point exultingly to the fact, that, instead of one-fifth of the entire population being

beggars,—as in the time of King Charles the Second,—the beggars now, *though really more numerous than ever*, bear a much smaller ratio to the whole population.”

“A very comfortable standpoint for all except the beggars. To their misery such a consideration can bring no alleviation, and unless their natures are much more angelic than ours, no consolation. Such special pleading is unworthy of England’s brilliant historian. Instead of evolving from his inner consciousness such feats of intellectual jugglery,—feats calculated to make still more satisfied with themselves a people in whom that quality has never been considered lacking, feats calculated to lull to sleep the consciences of upper classes,—Heaven knows, sufficiently soporific already,—he might have employed his marvellous powers of word painting in bringing home to the consciences of all the portentous fact, that in “merrie” England the tide of human misery and wretchedness *is each year rising higher and higher.*”

“I wish to heaven he had,” responded Mat fervently.

“That must surely be a diseased condition

of society in which the efforts of the millions tend mainly to the aggrandisement and indefinite increase of the fortunes of the few, in which, instead of thousands of the very poorest being lifted up by every wave of general prosperity and absorbed into its leading industries, we see the exact contrary taking place—thousands of its industrial classes losing heart, letting go their hold, and being swept by the retreating wave into the pauper abyss.”

“The laws of England have been skilfully framed *with a view to that very purpose*; so that whilst the few, with scarcely an effort, are gaily floated upon the waves of an advancing prosperity, the many, with the full force of the tide running against them, are unable to make the least headway.”

“I have again to ask whether you are quite sure, Mr. Cuthbert, that in making such a sweeping statement, you are strictly within the truth?”

“I can scarcely wonder,” replied Mat, “at your scepticism; but if you can think of any laws better adapted to keep the masses down than those by which they were divorced utterly and for ever from the soil, and their

employers given absolute power to fix their wages, or any laws better adapted to keep the few up and the many down—to keep the few in perpetual possession of the nation's land, and the many in a continual struggle with poverty in its bitterest and most degrading forms than the Laws of Primogeniture and Entail, I shall willingly acknowledge myself a victim of stupidity and prejudice.”

“At the moment I certainly cannot.”

“With the help of these laws the Normans have retained for over eight centuries their fierce grip of the English peasant. The fact that William the Norman divided the land of England amongst his captains would otherwise have been a matter of little consequence. It is only to the extent that you frame ‘iniquity into a law,’ that you contrive to make its action eternal. The Normans not only planted their feet upon the necks of the English people, *but their feet are there still*. The land laws—which they devised in their own interest and for the express purpose not only of making the English peasantry slaves, but of keeping them slaves for ever—*are virtually unchanged.*”

“With what consummate astuteness these laws must have been drawn up, and how carefully adapted to the end in view, seeing that, instead of becoming divided up, as it should naturally do with the enormous increase of population, the land, year by year, actually gets into fewer and fewer hands.”

“It was a very masterpiece of shrewd, though utterly selfish, legislation. At first sight it may seem as if it had failed in one of its ends. But upon a closer view it will be found, not only that the general condition of the agricultural labourer differs but little from that of the villeins of the Norman period, but that there is, besides, in England a large class of people *in a more abject condition still*; a class distinguishable from slaves or villeins by the fact that they are not only propertyless and moneyless, but, more terrible still, useless. Of this ‘human waste,’ known to their countrymen as paupers, there is in the England of to-day a mass equivalent to the entire population of the Norman period.”

“A mass of ‘human waste,’” repeated Evangeline in a tone of horror; “a mass of

‘human waste,’ equivalent to the entire population of the Norman period. What an awful commentary upon the boasted English civilization! To be propertyless and moneyless is certainly terrible enough, but to be useless is a lower deep still. It suggests a being the spring and elasticity of whose faculties have run down beyond hope of recovery—a being from whom all enterprise and manhood have been absolutely stamped out! Compared with that of a pauper, the position of a Russian serf or even a Virginian negro seems high up in the social scale. It seems to show that the Normans, in their eagerness to insure an abject population, slightly overshoot the mark.”

“A Virginian negro is an altogether higher order of human being. Instead of being destitute of self-respect, his self-respect is apt to mount up into the pompous—a clear proof that the iron has not entered into his soul. Upon an English pauper he would look down with an infinite scorn. And his epithet of ‘white trash’ would be only too expressive. Yes, they certainly overshoot the mark,” repeated Mat in a mournful tone.

“To get at the full meaning involved in such a statement,” he continued, “as that, giving the number of paupers in the England of to-day—in the workshop of the world—seems almost impossible. The mind refuses to take in what the bare fact means, so far as the immediate present is concerned. And the meaning becomes still more portentous when one endeavours to trace it link by link into the distant past, and becomes absolutely appalling if an attempt is made to estimate its bearings and unavoidable issues in the near and distant future. Were an endeavour made to calculate the misery, direct and indirect,—proceeding, like a stream from its fountain,—from the Law of Primogeniture and Entail—a law framed upon the contemptuous principle that Englishmen ‘had no rights, and never would have any, which the proud Normans were bound to respect’—a law tying up for long centuries the entire wealth proceeding from the lands of England, whether from their fruits above or their minerals below—a law conferring absolutely upon a few elder sons the entire powers, privileges, and enjoyments springing therefrom, and arbi-

trarily excluding from all participation in them all the people then living, and that should be born in the long stretch of time between that and the present moment, what a fearful sum total the whole would present ! Rolling up, *pari passu*, with the huge estate—what an aggregation of human misery—its exact and terrible equivalent ! ”

“ Can it be possible that such long-continued evils entail no day of reckoning ? ”

“ Possibly the account *may* have been kept in some celestial Court of Chancery ! French revolution eras seem to suggest that the gods are more exact reckoners than we mortals think. And, unfortunately for England, *the account is not yet closed.* ”

CHAPTER VII.

EVEN THE DOOR OF HOPE—SHUTS AGAINST THE ENTERPRISE OF THE FUTURE.

“Who does not wish that our clergy dared to exercise more of the same influence over our higher classes, and could prevent that most unchristian spirit of family selfishness and pride, by which too many wills of our rich men are wholly dictated?”—
DR. ARNOLD.

“Wealth has accumulated itself into masses, and poverty also, in accumulation enough, lies impassably separated from it, like forces in positive and negative poles. The gods of this lower world sit aloft on glittering thrones, less happy than Epicurus’s gods—but as indolent, as impotent; whilst the boundless living chaos of ignorance and hunger welters terrific in its dark fury under their feet.”—CARLISLE.

“IT puzzles, and I confess somewhat disgusts me, when your southern chivalry appeal to precedents in Biblical times in support of the peculiar institution.”

“It is a habit, Miss Lessing, inherited from their English ancestry, to whom a Biblical precedent, when it happens to suit them, still furnishes an unanswerable argument. Take away from them the weapons forged in that armoury, and how could English states-

men contrive to impose any longer, upon even a stupid people, a belief in the sacredness of that 'peculiar institution,' the Law of Primogeniture? And that keystone out of the arch," said Mat, assuming a horror-stricken expression, "the whole fabric of English institutions would tumble to pieces."

"If it is right and lawful for an eldest son to rob his younger brothers and sisters, one's moral sense is completely at sea. To brand as iniquitous the robbery of those to whom the thief is not even distantly related, seems in such a case a species of moral affectation. Why laws should be made for the protection and encouragement of the greater evil, and for the punishment of the lesser one, is beyond my feminine comprehension! That such laws should have originated in the darker ages of the world is not to be wondered at. That they should continue to exist in this era of light is the mystery."

"The solution of that mystery, so far as the English land laws are concerned is to be found in the existence of another more mysterious still "

"I am as wise as before, Sir Oracle. Do

you mean a wheel within a wheel, or something still more oracular ? ”

“ The oracle,” replied Mat solemnly, “ will proceed to elucidate itself, if invoked in dignified and befitting terms, and not in the spirit of badinage.”

“ Deign, oh Sir Oracle,” said Miss Lessing, with a mock reverence, “ to proceed with the elucidation.”

The muscles of Mat’s lips quivered slightly, but with an effort he proceeded.

“ The English pride themselves upon their clearightedness, and regard with wonder, verging on good-natured contempt, the continuance in other countries of what they term superstitious beliefs. But—and here is mystery number one—they continue to tolerate an institution, founded upon the belief of a doctrine compared with which the belief in the infallibility of the pope is easy, compared with which a belief in the miracles of Buddha is, in the highest degree, sane and rational. That people should be somewhat credulous in that cloudy region, where begin those unknown quantities, their spiritual interests, is in no way remarkable.

But that, where their material interests are concerned, they should shut their eyes and swallow something grossly irrational, is more remarkable still. And yet the continued existence in the England of the nineteenth century, of a House of Hereditary Legislators, argues in an entire people a degree of irrationality that could scarcely be expected out of Bedlam."

"Have a care, Mr. Cuthbert. The use of such strong language argues a degree of mental excitement, which, if prolonged, might prove dangerous. Shall I order a wet bandage?"

"Neither bandage nor badinage, if you please."

"I believe I may look upon that as a symptom of recovery. You may, I think, safely proceed to the elucidation of mystery number two."

"Mystery number two is the continued existence on the Statute Book of the Law of Primogeniture and Entail; an anachronism within an anachronism, a wheel within a wheel, an absurdity within an absurdity. For without the Law of Primogeniture and

Entail the House of Lords, would be impossible ! And without such an anachronism as a House of Hereditary Legislators, the continued existence of the Law of Primogeniture and Entail would be impossible."

"Two impossibilities, the unnatural conjunction of which renders impossible that philosophic equanimity which distinguishes—or, I should rather say, characterises—your politico-economic dissertations."

"It is very easy Miss Lessing, to laugh, and launch at my devoted head your polysyllabic expostulations. But you must recollect that I am still not many removes from an Englishman, and that it is very difficult for me to contemplate, with equanimity, the existence of an institution, which is proof to the entire world *that the Norman brand is still on the English people*. That masters should make laws for their slaves is natural enough. But that freemen, that Englishmen, should think twice before tearing from their necks that badge of slavery, the legislative collar attached by their former masters, brings a blush to my cheek, and a rushing sense of indignation to my heart."

“Your sensibility does you honour, Mr. Cuthbert. You have placed the matter in an entirely new light. That the emancipation of Englishmen should be still incomplete is an idea that never occurred to me.”

“How can it be complete, so long as they continue, with angelic sweetness, to allow their old masters to legislate for them?”

“A conundrum difficult to answer.”

“Those old Normans were wonderfully astute. It is a rare thing for mortals to get their own way whilst still in the flesh; but to contrive that when out of it things shall, for long centuries, shape themselves in accordance with their selfish will and pleasure, is, fortunately for their fellows, rarer still. By the original cession of the lands of England to William’s captains, the door was effectually shut against the enterprise of that generation. This iniquity, however, the natural course of events would have slowly but surely righted within a few generations. But by the action of the hard and fast Laws of Primogeniture and Entail, the land of England was kept tightly in the Norman clutch, *and even the door of hope* shut against the enterprise of the future.”

“How vividly you put it,” exclaimed Evangeline. “It seems as if the Norman had contrived to saddle himself upon the English people, like an ‘old man of the sea,’ and make them tributary for ever.”

“The Norman division of the lands of England was in itself no worse than previous divisions by the Saxons and the Danes. It was a deep wound in the social body, which the beneficent influences of time and favourable circumstances would have gradually healed. But these iniquitous laws, by which the avarice of the present stretched its unclean hands across the voiceless centuries, and joined itself to the avarice of the future, have kept this wound continually open, down even to our own times.”

“The second iniquity seems to have exceeded the original one.”

“Many times exceeded it. For under these laws, matters, instead of growing continually better, grow continually worse. Instead of this clutch round England’s throat relaxing, it seems to tighten with the advancing centuries. A strong statement, of which the proof is that those sturdy yeomen from whom

Cromwell organised that army 'which never failed to destroy and break in pieces' whatever force was opposed to it, and of whom, in the seventeenth century, there were some hundred and thirty thousand, are now extinct."

"As that number must have borne a still larger proportion to the then population of England than it does now, it certainly does look as if the Norman grip had in no way relaxed."

"Without the help of favouring laws, without any other aids than are afforded by the fierce selfishness of some, and the indolence and good-natured indifference of others, wealth has a natural tendency to aggregation, and large estates an innate tendency to swallow up the smaller ones. But with their help that tendency is increased in a tenfold degree."

"It can scarcely be considered surprising that such laws should inflame to madness an unnatural greed that borders upon it already."

"Exactly what has happened. Greed has merged into avarice, and that into a positively insane thirst for accumulation. The unbounded avarice of the upper classes has

generated a madness—a madness which, in England, at least, shows symptoms of spreading downwards. Instead of being ambitious of conferring some signal benefit upon his country, the leading ambition of an Englishman is to found a family, and get within a magic circle, lifted, as if by the force of gravitation itself, above the contingencies and casualties that beset the fortunes of ordinary mortals.”

“By most minds no higher heaven can be imagined. That the English elect should crowd into it is natural enough.”

“Unfortunately, the heaven which is reached by those who mount upon the wings of primogeniture and entail, like that other heaven,—the refuge also of an elect few,—seems to involve at the other extremity of the social scale a hell for the unhappy many; a deep, and apparently bottomless pit, where, unheeded by the saints of the upper circles, millions of hapless Englishmen have groaned for ages.”

“I protest against the assumptions involved in your theology; but let that pass. If the tying up and reserving for the sole use of an elect few of that which constitutes a nation’s

first source of wealth, the land, has been attended with such dire results—the tying up of its movable wealth—that resulting from commerce and manufactures—should that ambition to found a family become a passion—must necessarily be attended by results still more disastrous. Were the English to study the subject in the light reflected by the condition of a million paupers, they might possibly conclude that this unnatural aggregation of wealth had gone far enough.”

“If, as I am firmly persuaded,” said Mat, “the *evolution of a few noble lords has involved the evolution of almost countless ignoble paupers*, it should seem as if peers were a luxury, of which a nation might have more than enough.”

“The disposition to place under such a lock and key as the Law of Primogeniture and Entail the fortunes now being realised from commerce and manufactures, is a symptom calculated, one would think, to fill the mind of a statesman with alarm.”

“If the huge fortunes now being realised from commerce and manufactures are to be of as little service to any except their august

owners as those gigantic ones now locked up in the land, it would seem a curious problem, how many ages this sisyphæan labour must be continued before it begins, in any appreciable degree, to affect the lives and fortunes of the masses."

"Possibly some microscopic effect might be discernable in the course of a geologic æon."

"And, fortunately for humanity, the entire fabric will tumble about their ears in something less than a geologic period. This policy, which English statesmen doubtless consider a great and enlightened one,—for they have pursued it for centuries,—*I consider utterly inhuman*. Its great end and aim is to dam up, and confine within one huge reservoir—a reservoir accessible only to the elect few, and the sluices of which, thanks to that durable cement compounded of primogeniture and entail, become stronger, instead of weaker, with the lapse of centuries—that stream of wealth now flowing, or rather rushing, into England."

"One would think that the great aim of statesmanship should be a policy the exact

opposite—a policy that would busy itself in devising aqueducts and irrigating channels, by means of which the fructifying and healing streams might become accessible to all.

“Those who constitute the ‘social head,’” continued Evangeline, “are hugely mistaken in thinking that the condition of the feet is a matter about which their highnesses need give themselves no concern. Any one that has ever suffered from toothache knows that anything like persistent neglect of these humbler members of the body is sure to be visited with swift and sharp retribution, expressed in a form their royal jaws are not likely to forget.”

“Were there not a touch of madness in the social head,—did not the fever for accumulation rage to the point of insanity, such a self-evident truth could not escape it.”

“A wise statesmanship would take a lesson from the physician, and endeavour to stop this unnatural rush of blood to the head, by diverting a portion of it, at least, to the pale, bloodless feet.”

“The resources of statesmanship,” said Mat, in a tone of profound scorn, “are soon

exhausted. All that they have proved equal to so far, is the devising of a stout and strong ligature, called the Law of Primogeniture and Entail, the intent of which is to prevent the least particle of blood from reaching the feet. Whether they will ever prove equal to the task of taking it off is, to say the least of it, exceedingly problematical.

“The problems of the future,” he continued, “whilst differing in appearance from those of the past, are really the same in character. Despotism is protean in its forms, and it is only by slow and painful steps that humanity emerges into the light of liberty. In the past it has had to struggle with kings. To-day it has to struggle with landlords and capitalists. The upper classes have rid themselves of their tyrants. The lower classes are still groaning under theirs. In appearance different, the tyranny is, in both cases, essentially the same. The difference is not one of quality, but one of degree. For this much is clear, that the yoke of the most detested military satraps, before whom, in days gone by, our upper classes have toadied and cringed, was as roses and perfume compared with that blended yoke of landlord

and capitalist which to-day encircles the necks of the labouring poor."

"Wealth," said Evangeline, after a few minutes of absorbed silence, in the course of which her features had seemed to Mat to assume a rapt look that reminded him of the statue of a sibyl he had seen at Rome, "when it melts, like snow upon the plains of everyday life, seems fraught with only beneficence and blessing. Like snow, it changes its character, *in the exact proportion that it becomes piled up in masses*. When dispersed evenly, its action is invariably beneficent; in masses, its tendency is to the destructive."

"Snow, when falling, seems the very symbol of softness and gentleness. And yet it has an innate tendency to freeze and become hard as iron. Its beneficent qualities seem to depend on its being speedily melted. If allowed to accumulate or settle in deep drifts it becomes dangerous. And where, through the nature of the surroundings, the altitude of the land, or the coldness of the climate, the accumulations of the winter are only distributed in the summer with the greatest difficulty, the wise will be filled with alarm. For have not such

portents, in times past, ushered in a glacial era? If allowed, as in the higher latitudes, to accumulate for generations, the result is the iceberg or the avalanche."

"The iceberg, 'floating down in solitary grandeur, its thousand turreted pinnacles piercing above the mist, and shimmering like silver in myriad shapes of enchanting and massive grandeur,' is a glorious and an awe-compelling sight. But its vicinity is cold and freezing. For hundreds of miles the temperature is sensibly lowered. And it has an exceedingly ugly habit of floating quietly, but remorselessly, over everything it meets."

"Still, though a terribly disagreeable neighbour to stumble against upon the ocean of life, in daylight the iceberg may be avoided and given a wide berth."

"But how avoid the 'awful avalanche,' the same soft snow, allowed to accumulate for generations, and with ever-increasing volume and impetus, come rolling down the centuries? With such an aggregation of power the resources of civilization have hitherto been unable to cope."

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